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NAPOLEON'S LOVE STORY

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NAPOLEON'S LOVE STORY

A Historical Romance

BY

WACLAW GĄSIOROWSKI

AUTHOR OF "THE HURRICANE," "KAJETAN STUART," "THE LIGHT HORSE," "THE BLACK GENERAL," ETC.

TRANSLATED BY

THE COUNT DE SOISSONS

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INTRODUCTION

WHEN the young school of Polish *literati*, led by Przybyszewski, attacked the writers of the school at the head of which stands Henryk Sienkiewicz, accusing them, among other things, of sterility, the author of *Quo Vadis* refuted their accusation, and pointed to Waclaw Gąsiorowski as the worthy champion of that art of novel-writing which secured a world-wide renown to Sienkiewicz. And it is true that although Waclaw Gąsiorowski does not bring into literature any new element, he is a very able master of the historic romance, originated by Sir Walter Scott, as the readers of *Napoleon's Love Story* can judge for themselves.

It is strange that although there is an enormous number of volumes on the Napoleonic epoch, no one has revealed to us until now that charming idyll in which Madame Walewska appears as the embodiment of all the noble qualities of woman in general and of Polish ladies in particular. This is done by the author of the present volume through the medium of a fascinating story told simply and convincingly.

Waclaw Gąsiorowski was born some thirty years ago in Warsaw and comes from that petty Polish nobility of which there were, during the existence of the Polish Commonwealth, about 100,000, and which stood like a wall defending

eastern Europe against the invasions of Tartars, Turks, and Cossacks, their last extraordinarily valorous deed being the defeat at Vienna, in 1863, of 300,000 Turks by 25,000 Polish horsemen.

The two revolutions of 1848 and 1863 ruined Gąsiorowski's father, so that the novelist from the age of fifteen was forced both to earn his own living and educate himself as best he could. This he has done well, the best proofs of which are his several historical romances, such as *The Hurricane*, *The Light Horseman*, *Kajetan Stuart*, *The Black General*, etc.

Gąsiorowski is an enthusiastic admirer of Napoleon, and he has spent four years following his trail through Italy, Austria, Germany, Spain, Russia, Corsica and Elba. Finally he settled down in Paris where he goes from time to time to the tomb of *l'Empereur*, whose last romance and a good study of Polish society of a century ago I introduce to the English people with the hope that they will enjoy reading it as much as I have enjoyed translating it.

S. C. DE SOISSONS.

London,
March 30th, 1905.

NAPOLEON'S LOVE STORY

CHAPTER I

THE last day of 1806 was an agreeable surprise to Warsaw: during the night the sky shook off the lead-like clouds and rainy veils, which for a whole week had covered it, and appeared in a shining snowy mantle, with the smile of the sun and the calm of the frosty cold.

Warsaw was awaiting the long-desired guest, and welcomed him heartily as a foreboding of the new year, as a presage of brighter times, as an augury of the fulfilment of overgrown hope.

Merciless rain, as though in spite of the brightness of hearts, seemed to slander the country lying between the Rivers Oder, Niemen, Warta, and Wisla. The French soldiers swore at the mud, the general staff cursed the bad weather, and the swells of the army wondered how it was possible to stand winter in a country with such a wretched climate. Even the inhabitants of the mansion of Count Maurycy Potocki, who offered his hospitality to Marshal Murat, whispered that the Emperor himself complained of the bad weather.

Those who surrounded the Emperor would swear that they did not remember such an awful December, and the witty ones explained that the rain was due to the abundant tears of General Köhler, who was forced to leave Warsaw; all, however, agreed that every day very cold weather might be expected. In the meanwhile the rain, with penetrating cold, continued.

The reviews of the troops were not successful; stores were drenched and rotted, fever decimated the regiments, and, what was worse, there came news from Carnow, Golymin, Dzialdow, and Pultusk that there also the bad weather was very much in the way of the Emperor's plans.

Then suddenly, on the 29th of December, came the news about Napoleon's new victory on the shores of the River Narew; but it was not confirmed officially—the drums in the guard-house were silent.

It was impossible to get any news from Alexandre Potocki's mansion; for that day, as it seemed, even the Countess Anna herself could not see Murat, who was not well, and there was no other source, Wybicki having gone with the Emperor.

Only on the Festival of St. Sylvester, as if under the influence of the sun, the guard-house became animated with the noise of drums, and the Prince of Berg communicated to Count Potocki the news about the victory at Pultusk and the expected return of the Emperor to Warsaw. The last news seemed to arouse the greatest enthusiasm, for nobody doubted Napoleon's victory, whereas it was difficult to believe that he would return to the capital of New Western Prussia, for during his previous sojourn in Warsaw he had made clear that it was merely one more headquarters and a military depôt.

On that occasion he came during the night, not paying any attention to the bunting displayed for his reception. He was satisfied with the empty castle and bread and water for his supper. He had a short conversation with the representatives of the country and with Wybicki, in which the principal topic was provisions for the army; the following day was given to a hasty inspection of the shores of the River Wisla—such was his first acquaintance with Warsaw. He came like a thunderbolt and disappeared like a meteor.

Therefore the news about the Emperor's coming made the hearts of the inhabitants of Warsaw throb. The statesmen regarded that visit as an historical fact of great importance, and the accomplishment of lavish promises made in Berlin and Posen; the youths hoped that they would have more chances to adorn themselves with epaulettes and crosses, and to get the diplomas for the higher military grades; a crowd of the

courtiers of the late King Stanislaus Poniatowski had become arrogant, remembering former favours, and were beginning to intrigue with Talleyrand, with Prince Borghese, the Emperor's brother-in-law, with Murat, and even with such officers of the staff as MM. de Noailles and Lagrange. The first news of balls and receptions was circulating in the drawing-rooms, and in the castle the privilege of precedence, court dress, and etiquette were the principal topics.

The dusk was falling, and the streets of Warsaw were thronged with people. The noise of the frozen snow under the feet of the pedestrians was mingled with the joyful tintinabulation of sledge-bells, shouting of coachmen, and noisy conversation.

The houses were lit up; in the porticoes of the mansions shone big lanterns; the footmen lighted the torches; shops and restaurants were ablaze with yellowish-red light.

The noise increased every hour.

As if in response to the thousand lights with which Warsaw adorned herself, the sapphire-like sky shone with millions of stars, and the bright moon lit up the immensity of the horizon.

From the direction of the Wolska Gate was heavily rolling an old-fashioned carriage drawn by six fat bay horses dragging the vehicle with difficulty through the heavy drifts of snow. The wheels of the carriage were clogged with snow, and, besides all this, when entering Senatorska Street it met so many different kinds of vehicles that it was obliged to go very slowly and to stop every little while.

Before coming to Maryville the street became broader. The coachman whipped up the horses in order to pass a sledge going ahead, when from the direction of Bielanska Street there came several peasant carts escorted by soldiers. The traffic was stopped, and the carriages were obliged to wait.

It seemed that the new obstacle aroused the impatience of those who were within the carriage, for its window, covered with frost, opened, and the charming voice of a lady was heard.

"Ian, why did you stop again?"

A sturdy footman sitting beside the coachman turned to answer, when, at the same moment, there came out from the coach another voice—sharp and irritable.

"Evidently you wish me to catch cold again!"

"No, but . . ."

"You are in a hurry! . . . I know, I know! But it's useless for you to hurry. I told you that if the Princess did not leave her visiting cards at our residence we would stay at home."

"As you wish," answered the woman's trembling voice.

The window was closed. The footman, who was waiting for an opportunity to answer the question, turned towards the coachman and muttered—

"Pretty sour!"

"Old age makes him so," answered the coachman.

"And jealousy too."

"Yes, and he torments that poor thing awfully. To-day, in Walewice, she cried, not wishing to go. The chambermaid told me so."

"I know," answered the footman sorrowfully. "I used to carry her in my arms. Her father turns in his grave at the thought of the miserable life our lady is living with that old man, who abuses everybody. Yesterday he scolded me as if I were an ordinary farm-hand."

The coachman nudged the footman. "Be careful, they might hear you."

"I don't care," he answered angrily, and became silent, for at that moment there resounded again the harsh voice.

"You have shut the window. . . . You wish me to suffocate . . ."

The window opened again.

"Why did you stop?" screeched the same voice. "And you do not care at all . . ."

"You did not permit me to ask," said the same sweet woman's voice.

"Yes, perhaps you would like to have a written consent. Yes, I know, you would not care even if I froze to death. Nothing to sigh about, madame; I am old, you will outlive me. Yes, you will."

A sudden jerk of the coach and creaking of the frozen axles interrupted the quarrel.

Now the coach rolled swiftly, turned into Miodowa Street, passed the Pace Mansion, and, keeping on the side of the

Basilean Church, stopped in the front of the last house in Dluga Street, not far from the famous Raczynski Mansion.

The footman jumped down from his box and rapped at the *porte cochère.* The door opened wide, showing a brightly lighted hall. Several servants rushed out and began to unstrap the boxes at the back of the coach. The footman opened the carriage door and helped a lady wrapped up in costly fur to alight; then he called one of the servants, and with his aid helped out the old gentleman all wrapped up in furs.

The lady entered the hall and disappeared, whilst the gentleman was still at the door of the coach scolding and asking the footman ten times over about every smallest package.

The passers by, attracted by the coach, surrounded it. The gentleman grew impatient, searched for his ebony stick, and looked contemptuously towards the crowd. At the same moment a fat man, clad in a shabby fur, came to him and bowed humbly.

The gentleman looked him up and down, and asked hesitatingly—"Excuse me. . . I do not remember. . ."

"Are you not Pan Anastazy Walewski?" asked in his turn the fat man.

"Yes . . . but . . ."

"The Chamberlain. . . I haven't seen you for half a century! Don't you recognise me? *Parole d'honneur!* as for me, it's no wonder; you grow younger. Well, do you still not recollect? . . . I am Bolesha."

"A . . . Bolesha! I am glad," answered Walewski, shaking hands quite stiffly with the man.

"The same. One of the triumvirate! Dlucki, Bolesha, Hulewich. And do you remember Dzbanski, *brave homme,* he can't move either hand or foot; they bled him three times. I see, you have just come. For the Carnival? Ha! ha! I understand—*Madame votre épouse.* And the Carnival promises to be a brilliant one; Prince Borghese is going to give a ball; Monsieur de Talleyrand is at home twice a week; Madame de Vauban is indefatigable as usual; the Countess Potocka's receptions are famous for her suppers, and when the Emperor returns, *Madame votre épouse* will be very busy."

"You are mistaken; we came only for a few days on some business. But you must excuse me, it is cold"

"I wouldn't dare to refuse you! I am at your service!"

Walewski looked astonished at Bolesha, for he could not understand how it happened that he invited him while he wished so much to get rid of him; but not finding a polite excuse for sending "the bore" away, he turned towards the hall. Bolesha followed him, talking constantly and keeping close to him.

The Chamberlain was met by his French valet, who very adroitly helped him to take off his fur overcoat, fur overshoes, fur gaiters, and fur jacket, till his master appeared in a steel-coloured, swallow-tail coat on which shone the star of an order, a pale yellow waistcoat embroidered with flowers, and brown kneebreeches.

The Chamberlain breathed now with evident pleasure, and being seated in front of a blazing fire, drank a bowl of hot grog served to him by the valet. As for Bolesha, he looked at Walewski, and rubbed his frozen hands, while a malicious smile wandered over his brick-red face, the principal characteristic of which was a large bluish cucumber-like nose.

Walewski seemed to have guessed Bolesha's thought, for he swallowed the punch, and said abruptly—

"What do you think of me now?"

"You have grown thinner while I was looking at you. Two-thirds were taken off you by your valet."

Walewski made an impatient movement with his mouth, and said, with barely concealed irritation—

"You mean that I am old."

"*Jamais de la vie!* We are both of the same age. I am obliged to wear a wig, while you . . . then when one has such a young wife, one grows younger. What! But you used to have good wine. I am glad you do not offer me any grog, for I can't drink it . . . *Parole d'honneur!*"

The Chamberlain rang for the valet and ordered some wine. Bolesha was beaming.

"This morning I had a presentiment of good news, and it's realised. How glad I am to see you again. For there are few men left from our times . . . good times! We are scattered . . . Some of them, like that brave Grabski, became monks; others, like Grotus, were married, and they dandle grandchildren; and those who did not die entered the army."

"Perhaps you are going to do the same, eh?"

"*Parole d'honneur!* They all enter the army . . . Rautenstrauch and Hebduski have enlisted already. The stream carries them all; everybody wishes to wear a uniform. Ah! wine! You must be glad that Wybicki does not know about your wine; he would have commandeered it for the army."

"And who is at the head of the Government?"

"His Majesty Pan Joseph Wybicki!" answered Bolesha, with comical gravity.

"Which Wybicki?"

"There is only one Sun, one Cato, one Wybicki! The member of the Diet, General Dombrowski's comrade, friend of M. de la Roche, owner of the Manichek estate, father of two sons!"

"And such a man is at the head?"

"Yes . . . yes, he is."

"I am sure he secured this position by intrigue, for it would have been proper to look to those who formerly were of some importance. That Bonaparte sympathises with vulgar people. . . . My brother has written to me about it, but I did not think that he would go as far as that."

"The revolution is still ruling. The Chevalier de Saint Ville got jaundice when they enumerated the new *ducs* to him. There were instances also in our country that partisans with blue blood . . . *Vous vous rappelez!* Pani Roch Kossowska, Merlini's daughter, better known as Orzelska . . . But to grant coronets to simple officers! And it seems that the same will be done in our country. Mme. de Vauban is in despair, for her loyal attachment to the Bourbons was hurt; if it were not for her love for Prince Joseph Poniatowski, *vulgo Pepi*, she would have left for Vienna. Naturally our ladies are very satisfied with such a state of affairs, and many a heart beats already for uniforms. What can we do? In the meanwhile, there is no order, one does not know who rules, any general does what he likes. Everywhere spurs and swords and the cry, War! dominate. *Parole d'honneur!* All is going wrong!"

Bolesha became silent and filled his glass. Walewski was sitting motionless looking into the fire.

The silence was broken by the valet carrying a letter and spectacles on a silver tray.

The Chamberlain tore the envelope nervously, glanced at the letter, and said abruptly—

"Tell her ladyship to dress! Call Baptiste to me."

Bolesha growled at the title "her ladyship." The Chamberlain turned. "You say . . . ?"

"I am delighted with your wine! It is the best cheap wine I ever drank."

Walewski laughed at the hint.

"Excuse me, I have not my butler with me; we came here for a few days only. The Princess writes to me."

"About the marriage of your grandson with the Princess Radziwil."

"How do you know it?"

"It's my secret."

"Have you heard anything else?"

"Only this, that the Countess Ossolinska proposes to push her son in that direction."

"Then I do not understand why my sister . . ."

"The Princess Jablonowska has her plans . . . all depends . . . your son is very rich; but should the estate of Walewice be excluded from his expected inheritance, then your grandson will not be such a good *parti* as he seems to be just now."

"What an idea! I settled on my wife two estates—the remainder of my property will come to my son Ksawery."

"It is so . . . but suppose you have an heir, what then?"

Walewski made a movement of impatience.

"You are joking at me. You think that my wife's beauty has deprived me of my common sense, that I have forgotten that I am an old man."

Bolesha laughed, and closing his eyes, cunningly answered—

"I would not make any wager. One of the most beautiful women in Poland! *Parole d'honneur!* I do not mean to hurt your feelings, but it happens very often. One must count with this. The daughter of a Prince Radziwil . . ."

"Let us not talk about that," interrupted Walewski drily. "I am sorry to be obliged to stop such an interesting conversation, but I must dress."

"That's right, you must not stand on ceremony with me, *parole d'honneur!* When are you going to leave town?"

"In three or four days; I have nothing to do here."

"What a pity, *parole d'honneur!* The Carnival will be unusually brilliant this year. I am your servant! I hope I shall see you to-night. Pray present my respects to *Madame votre épouse.*"

Bolesha shook hands with the Chamberlain and went out.

Walewski breathed freely, sat in the armchair and closed his eyes. But the valet, who was already waiting at the door, cleared his throat significantly. The Chamberlain woke up and looked round.

"Ah! it's you, Baptiste," he said in French.

"Yes, sir; it's time to dress."

"Well, then I must."

Walewski rose slowly, as a man who must go to do some hard work, and, leaning on a walking-stick, went to the dressing-room; there he sat in an armchair, and dropped his arms to signify that his valet could do what he pleased with him.

The Frenchman set to work not only with skill, but also with the familiarity of a man who knows all the feeble and sore points of his master. The task was a very difficult one. Walewski was over seventy years old, different ailments had made a skeleton of him, covered with parchment-like skin, and a stormy life had made him sour and irritable.

Walewski had seen much in his life. He remembered Brühl, the Prime Minister of Augustus III., King of Poland; he knew well the last king, Stanislaus Poniatowski; he used to be a frequent guest in his Lazienki Palace, and never missed a ball or a levée; he was a good companion to men, and very much liked by the ladies, perhaps too impressionable to their charms. That kind of fast living had some effect on his financial position, but as he was the grandson in direct line of Joseph Colonna Walewski, Palatine of Lenczyca, who married the enormously rich Panna Grabska, and as he inherited also from a cousin, he could afford to spend lavishly and still to be very rich, the more so as he had some other inheritance from collateral branches of the family.

Walewski's riches had this effect upon him, that he forgot his old age, and that he did not hesitate to marry for a third time, although he was seventy-eight years old, his neighbour Pani

Lonczynska's daughter, whose estate, Kiernozia, was mortgaged to the last penny.

Only a few weeks after this merry wedding Pan Walewski had understood that he was very old. Up to that time face powder, red paint, corsets, and certain drugs sufficed in a certain degree to make him look younger, when suddenly even those means became insufficient. Then he got hold of the famous Baptiste, who was in the service of the Prince de Ligne. The Frenchman did his best. It was not difficult for him to make Pan Walewski look a well-preserved husband, but the difficulty was to do as he wished, to be as young as his twenty years' old wife.

There were days that Pan Walewski would lose his faith in Baptiste, and would not allow himself to be dressed by him, but it was only when in Walewice he could order the doors of his château to be shut and not receive anybody.

Closeted in his apartments, he would read novels, would try to cure himself, would listen to long reports of what "her ladyship" was doing, would doze, and delight in all the habits of old age.

But as soon as he was obliged to perform some social duty, when he was to show himself to the people, he would jump from his soft chair, would throw away the warm wraps with which he was enveloped, and call Baptiste.

That evening the French valet was obliged to work harder than ever, for Pan Walewski was tired by the journey, irritated by the conversation with Bolesha, and therefore suffering more than ever. Baptiste began by administering refreshing salts to him and rubbing his stiff limbs, for the Chamberlain told him that he would not take his walking-stick to the Princess's ball.

More than an hour passed, and Baptiste had not yet finished his work. Walewski interrupted him twice, telling him that he would not go to the ball; but the respect for the drawing-room took the upper hand over the old courtier. The Princess counted on him, his son Ksawery begged him to come, some one of the Radziwil family could say that there was lack of love between father and son, and the gossip would injure his matrimonial plans with the young Princess. They were already gossiping about them, as he learned from Bolesha.

The Chamberlain was thinking with fear how many times he would be obliged to bow at that ball, how many tiresome hours he would be obliged to spend there, and all that he was going to undergo for Ksawery, or rather for the sake of an alliance with the Radziwils; for the Chamberlain had been angry with his son for some time past.

As long as Ksawery was a bachelor and his father not married their relations were most pleasant, but when Ksawery married Panna Wodzinska and had children, and then when later on his father took the fancy also to marry a young wife, he was irritated at the thought that he was a grandfather. Then Ksawery was fond of talking about past times and of mentioning precise dates on every opportunity, which habit was the principal cause of bad relations between father and son.

Only the Princess Jablonowska, Walewski's sister, undertook to set to rights everything, or rather not to permit that such a "goose" as was his young wife should have any influence over him and wrong Ksawery's sons.

The Princess knew her brother's feeble side, and she almost succeeded.

For three weeks letters were exchanged between her and Pan Walewski, and finally he was persuaded to come to Warsaw. The prestige of the Radziwils did that.

It is true that Pan Walewski traced his family to the Roman patricians, and he was fond of repeating that there was hardly another family as old as his. However, the hope of an alliance with the Radziwils drove away his indifference towards his son and grandsons; it awoke the courtier's ambitions.

Full two hours had passed when the Chamberlain, perfumed, powdered, and painted, looked into a mirror, and was obliged to say to himself that he looked wonderfully young. His waist, straightened by a corset, made him look much younger; a grey evening dress was becoming to him, and the blue ribbon of the Order was in beautiful contrast with his gold waistcoat, while the lace of his shirt covered discreetly the diamond buttons; only his face seemed to him to be too much painted, and he dared to make a remark about it to Baptiste, who smiled ironically, and said in a tone that permitted no reply—

"It can't be otherwise."

Pan Walewski sighed, took a snuff-box artistically chiselled and set with diamonds, a present from the late king, and, trying to stop his coughing with a very fine handkerchief, dragged his feet to his wife's apartments.

Pani Walewska was already waiting for her husband, and as he entered her boudoir she rose and said—

"Then we are going?"

Pan Walewski wanted to answer angrily, as was his custom, but, enraptured by his wife's beauty, stopped, put his eyeglass to his eye, and looked at his wife. Never before had he found her as beautiful as that night.

Pani Walewska blushed under the influence of the cynical look of her husband, a shiver ran through her beautiful face and her big, dark sapphire eyes, hid under long lashes.

Pan Walewski laughed from sheer pleasure. "*Charmante! Charmante!*" he whispered, coughing discreetly; and coming near his wife, he put his arm round her waist and wanted to kiss her with his toothless mouth.

Pani Walewska shivered with aversion and leaned backwards; her husband tottered and kept his equilibrium with an effort.

"You escape!" he muttered, laughing quietly. "I shall find you! By the way, again a white dress! You have a fancy for that colour. Why do you not wear the diamond necklace?"

"I have told you so many times that I do not like it."

"You do not like it! The idea! It is a family jewel, a costly souvenir from my grandmother, the Palatine of Lenczyca."

"You must excuse me this time."

"Every time you repeat 'this time.' After all, that modesty is becoming to you; one can admire you, although you are too sentimental. You must remember that at the Princess's ball the whole of society will be gathered."

"It is just the same to me."

"Very well! I do not mean that you should care for compliments, but you must remember your social position—you are a Walewska! You must take care of your frocks, especially when there is a question about marrying my grandson with a Radziwil."

At the sound of the word "grandson" Pani Walewska looked at her husband with astonishment, and wished to ask him some

question, but she refrained from doing so. Pan Walewski finished his admonition by opening and closing his snuff-box.

"Let it be for to-night. I forgive you, for you are looking charming, you do not know how beautiful you are. You are still lacking in that animation which Anetka Tyszkiewicz has. Well, let us be going. Take my arm, and do not go quickly."

The Chamberlain, having become suddenly animated, put his fur overcoat on quickly, and sat beside his wife in the carriage.

He was highly pleased to have such a beautiful wife, and that everybody should envy his good luck.

Under the influence of such thoughts he became suddenly rejuvenated, leaned towards his wife and tried to find more caressing words while giving her some instructions.

"You must be very attentive to the Princess, for she is our nearest relation. She is very fond of you; she told me so several times in her letters."

"I always try to please her."

"Yes, but there was something between you and her. The Princess is perfect in every respect. You are younger; you have married into a great family; you must try to win people to your side and not mind every word."

"Sometimes it is difficult," said Pani Walewska. "The Princess was prejudiced against me."

"It only seemed so to you. If there was anything, it was because of her sisterly love towards me."

Here the Chamberlain stopped suddenly short, having remembered his sister's efforts to break his engagement with Panna Lonczynska. All the fears of the Princess came to his mind. Until now he had no reason to complain, for his wife was submissive, and her only fault was the crying, which so often dulled her bright eyes; her only hobbies were books and the spinet. The Chamberlain took credit to himself for all his wife's qualities, according to his way of looking at things; he watched her carefully, and did not give her any opportunity to overstep the boundaries of his estate. Their going to the ball to-day was his wife's first step on the slippery parquet of the drawing-room.

The Chamberlain was seized with uneasiness. For the first time he was afraid of society, without which formerly he could

not live. There was a moment when he wanted to give the order to return home, and then to hide his treasure and his old age; but it was too late, for the carriage stopped at the brightly illuminated portico of the Princess's mansion. The Chamberlain coughed, and began to alight slowly.

On their entering the drawing-room they were welcomed by the Princess—a short, thin, overdressed, and too-much-painted lady.

"How nice of you! I am very much obliged for your coming. I thought you would not come. *Chère Marie, toujours belle!* I should have been so unhappy without you. Xavier was already uneasy. . . ."

The Chamberlain said a few words, kissed his sister's hand ceremoniously, and then entered the ballroom. They were greeted by a slight whispering. Pan Walewski glided quite boldly in, bowing to the right and to the left. His wife, under the fire of persistent looks spying her every movement, every part of her dress, grew pale, and walked beside her husband not seeing anybody nor hearing complimentary whispers. The Princess's drawing-room seemed to her to be a brilliant abyss, filled up with bright rustling silk, and with the noise of disorderly conversation, in which she felt a stranger and exposed to malicious remarks and biting criticism. It was the same world through which she was obliged to walk the day of her wedding—cold, *grand monde.*

The Chamberlain seated his wife on a settee between the Princess Dominik Radziwil and the Countess Alexandre Tyszkiewicz, and having sat in an armchair looked triumphantly round him. His wife was the most beautiful. There were, however, many beautiful ladies that evening, and among them those whose beauty was famous throughout the country, such as Pani Sobolewska, Constance Countess Lubienska, Vicenty Countess Krasinska, and Pani Joseph Rautenstrauch, Pani Luszczewska, and the two Countesses Michel and Stanislaus Potocki, not counting young ladies who, though not able to secure the opinion of connoisseurs, had their admirers.

The Chamberlain's triumph, however, was short. His son came to greet him, and then he began a conversation, making all possible efforts to mark his words with cordiality.

Then came his son Kazimierz, and his grandson, who was followed by numerous acquaintances and those who thought it their duty to be introduced to the Chamberlain. Pan Walewski became animated, and having sat beside the Princess Dominik Radziwil, displayed all his drawing-room art of conversation.

The gathering at the Princess Jablonowska's was very numerous—the whole of Warsovian society responded to her invitation, for in her drawing-rooms they could get the latest news, meet remarkable and famous people, such as Prince Borghese and Talleyrand, who lived in the Princess's mansion during their sojourn in Warsaw.

Consequently, the St. Sylvester ball was brilliant. From the aged Marshal Malachowski down to youths just entering the lists of life, everybody came, and formed groups round richly embroidered French uniforms. And when about midnight Prince Borghese and the Prince de Berg came with Talleyrand, the guests surrounded them, trying to gain their favours.

CHAPTER II

IN the meanwhile, Pani Walewska, having fallen into the hands of the Countess Alexandre Potocka, popularly called by her maiden name Anetka Tyszkiewicz, stood her first attacks bravely, and slowly regained her presence of mind, when Anetka began questioning her wittily about her secluded life in Walewice.

Pani Walewska defended herself as best she could, but the Countess Potocka was not satisfied with evasive answers, and said—

"To be sure, your husband is unrivalled! What animation, what grace in his movements, what charm in his manners; the young men should look on him as a model."

Pani Walewska looked in the direction where her husband was sitting with the Princess Radziwil, and blushed.

Anetka pretended not to see.

"Pray, judge for yourself—there to the right is Pan Kazimierz Walewski, the grandson. Don't you think one can see that time is weighing upon him? But permit me to introduce him to you.'

Pani Walewska wished to answer something, but the Countess Potocka had already made a graceful movement with her fan towards Pan Walewski.

"Monsieur Casimir!" solemnly began the Countess Potocka. "Pray forgive my calling you, but I considered it to be my duty to introduce you to our dear Pani Walewska."

"I am very much obliged," gabbled Pan Kazimierz Walewski, trying to adorn his withered face with a stupid smile. "I had just the honour . . ."

"What a blunder!" burst out Anetka, laughing. "*C'est votre grande mère!* Excuse me, my dearest, I have introduced your grandson to you. *Ma foi,* I did not think of it!"

Pani Walewska's eyes filled with tears, whilst the young

Walewski, trying to be amiable, paid her a stupid compliment, calling her "beautiful grandmother."

Anetka could not contain herself any longer, and, excusing herself, she flew towards Pani Sobolewska, that she might share the amusing prank which she had played on "a country lady."

Pani Sobolewska was very glad to have an opportunity of wagging her sharp tongue, and in a few minutes the drawing-room was filled with whispers and malicious laughter. Adroitly repeated and adorned, the news amused everybody. All eyes were turned again toward Pani Walewska, and the Chamberlain became a target for ironical smiles, while the gentlemen crowded round his wife.

Pani Walewska was blushing, and frightened under the smiles and mien of these men, for every one of them seemed to cry victory by their forbearing smiles, ambiguous words, and intruding looks. The most persevering and insistent, however, was a little fat Frenchman, Hercean, who having seated himself beside Pani Walewska, and turning his thumbs round each other, paid her compliments, sighed, and spoke about the rose that blossomed in the dusk of cold December; about the longing which, after years of wandering, falls at the feet of an ideal and vanishes in old age; about his first hour of happiness found in a foreign country after years of banishment.

For some time Pani Walewska pretended that she did not understand the Frenchman, but when he became more precise about his sentiments, thinking her short answers were such as to give him more courage, Pani Walewska interrupted him quietly, saying—

"Can I be frank with you?"

"I would consider it a favour!"

"You seem only to care to talk about love."

"Yes, to-day. Are you surprised? The flower of the heart must turn towards the sun, even if it has to wither."

"I don't think you are afraid of that."

"For even that alternative would be a paradise for me. It is better to lose the chance of entering Paradise, than not to see it at all."

"I think differently."

"You are cruel. . . . You attract and repulse. . . ."

Pani Walewska made no reply, but looked round helplessly for someone to come to her rescue. Help arrived in the person of her hostess, who, having seized the thread of the gossip, thought proper to interfere, and having taken the Chamberlain's wife aside she said sweetly—

"*Chère Marie!* You must excuse me, but you ought not to give the gossipers an opportunity! My poor brother will be very upset. You are imprudent . . . and the people are malicious. . . . I was obliged to explain to the Princess Dominik."

"I do not understand what you mean," interrupted Pani Walewska, almost crying.

"Well, I am not going to make any reproaches. My poor brother was prepared for some indulgence, but pray, you must try to win Jeannette Radziwil, for the Ossolinskis are intriguing. . . . Let us go to the red boudoir. . . . Only believe me . . . Prince Borghese was looking much at you, and even Murat. . . . It would need only some *duc* of yesterday to fall in love with you. . . . My poor brother would pay for that with his death. . . ."

Princess Jablonowska, not permitting Pani Walewska to say a word, conducted her to a side boudoir, where a group of young ladies, having escaped the solemnity of the drawing-room, were chatting with animation with the young men who were paying them attention. Then the Princess pointed out to Pani Walewska a small, dark-haired lady, dressed in pale blue, and chatting with a beardless youth. She whispered—

"Do you see how constant is the young Ossolinski to her? Casimir is incorrigible!" Then coming to the dark-haired girl she said, with warm cordiality—

"Dear Jeannette, I am looking for you . . . I have missed your sweet face so much. Pani Anastazy Walewska wished to meet you."

The Chamberlain's wife was ready to curtsey to the young Princess, when suddenly she felt her arms round her neck.

"Mary! Then it's you! Is this the way you greet your Jeannette!"

Only at this moment did Pani Walewska recognise her best friend from boarding-school.

"Then you are old friends!" said the Princess sneeringly. "You did not tell me!"

"I did not know that the question was about my dear Jeannette."

Princess Radziwil laughed heartily.

"The Princess Palatine introduced you so solemnly that I was afraid to kiss you."

"I am very glad," said the Princess smilingly. "Now enjoy yourselves together; I will not interfere."

The two friends did not need to be encouraged in that respect. They left the group, and, having seated themselves on a settee in a corner, began to question each other, jumping from one subject to another, recollecting times spent over Filassier's educational dictionary, stiff conversation, and French notebooks.

Jeannette told her friend about all her troubles, beginning with frocks which that unbearable Joubert had not yet delivered, and ending by telling her of the puzzling humour of Victor Ossolinski, who was prepossessed with an opinion against a Walewski, although very unjustly indeed.

Having pronounced the name Walewski, Jeannette stopped and asked suddenly—

"But you are a Walewska also! Perhaps it is your cousin?"

"As it seems!" answered evasively the Chamberlain's wife.

"You must introduce me to your husband. Is he here?"

"Yes, he is."

"Very well, then. You have not changed at all. It is only two weeks since we arrived. We could not get our passports! So alarming! Interrogations at every gate; they stopped us several times; plenty of soldiers on every road. If it had not been for General Benigsen's letter, we could not have reached Warsaw! How glad I am to see you! I felt so lonely here! Well, kiss me! Only you are a married lady. . . . Madame . . . what?"

"Anastazy Walewska."

"Wait . . . are you not a relation of that Walewska . . . a while ago Victor told? . . . Monsieur Victor!"

A youth standing not far off came and bowed.

"You have deigned to call me."

"Yes, I have deigned!" affirmed the Princess Radziwil with comical gravity. "You have to bow as graciously as you can. . . . *Voilà.* Chevalier Victor Ossolinski . . . most unbearable . . . and this is my dearest friend, Mary Lonczynska. . . . Yes! For me always dear, sweet, good-hearted Mary."

"I am! . . ."

"Obstinate," interrupted Jeannette, slapping Ossolinski's hand slightly. "You are called here to repeat the story about grandmother and grandson."

"It was during the Sylvester night at the Princess Palatine's. Chevalier Walewski having noticed a lady of extraordinary beauty, fell in love, threw himself at her feet, kissed the hem of her dress . . . and offered, besides himself, all he had and what he expected to inherit. The lady listened indulgently, but excused herself as she was married. Chevalier Walewski proposed divorce. The lady consented. But suddenly there appeared on the scene a brother of Chevalier Walewski, and scolded him—for the lady is their grandmother. Moral: a grandson must not come into this world before his grandmother."

Jeannette was bursting with laughter. Pani Walewska grew pale and nearly fainted. The Princess was frightened.

"Mary, what is the matter with you?"

"Nothing—it will pass," she muttered with an effort. "Water!"

Ossolinski rushed for water.

Pani Walewski recovered, and explained that she was tired by a long journey.

The Princess, having exchanged a significant look with Ossolinski, began to talk about Napoleon.

Ossolinski's eyes became brighter.

"Mary, have you seen the Prince of Berg?" said the Princess, not permitting Ossolinski to talk.

"Yes, from afar."

"And I have chatted with him for a whole hour . . . he is a little unnatural in his manners . . . but he is nothing compared with the Emperor, whose look is so penetrating that our most eloquent men are silent in his presence. I should like so much to see him."

"There will be plenty of opportunities," said Ossolinski, "for to-morrow evening he is coming from Pultusk. There will be a reception in the Castle."

"If only mother would take me . . . or rather, if we should receive an invitation! as it seems the Emperor does not like ladies. The list of the invited will not be very long. . . . Ah! I shall be so unhappy. . . ."

"But there cannot be a doubt," said Ossolinski, trying to console her. "You will not be forgotten."

"Who knows? Mamma does not like to take me everywhere, and I am so anxious to see everything, especially Napoleon."

"It is worse with me, and I do not complain," said Ossolinski, tugging impatiently at the down on his upper lip.

"Why?"

"A guard of honour is to be formed. I wished to enlist, and they thought that I was too young yet."

"The idea!" exclaimed Jeannette indignantly.

"Therefore I have not the slightest chance of seeing him, for, even when he passes through the streets, it will be impossible to have a glance at him on account of the big crowds. Well, when one has such an aunt! . . ."

"Cousin!"

"But I shall take advantage of the first opportunity, and shall enlist in the great army; I shall go to the end of the world."

Jeannette blushed, and having dropped her bright eyes, whispered—

"Would you do it?"

"Well . . . I do not know, though!"

"And you, Mary?" asked the Princess of Pani Walewska, who silently listened to the conversation of the young people. "I presume you will be invited with your husband to the reception. Ah, how much I would like to be a married woman!"

"I do not think so," answered Pani Walewska quietly. "To-morrow we return to Walewice."

"You will not wait for Napoleon's reception at the Castle?"

"No, my husband is not well; and then, as you know, we do not go out much."

"Ah, yes," affirmed the Princess, having recollected that her friend came from a not very rich, although an old family.

"But perhaps it will be worth your while to sacrifice something. The Princess Palatine says that there never will be another such chance of seeing so many heroes all at once."

"I should like very much . . . to see Napoleon, at least! Centuries will pass before another like him will be born. Then he comes here for us. . . ."

"That is uncertain, they say. The Princess Palatine calls him simply a usurper and a revolutionist. Ah! you should hear what M. de Talleyrand says of him! Simply this, that it is not certain whether his family comes from the nobility or not."

"It does not lessen his glory."

"Nor my curiosity."

"Yours will be satisfied."

"I will give you advice," said Ossolinski.

"We are listening."

"Let us go to-morrow to meet the Emperor!"

"But where to?"

"One could ascertain about the hour of his coming. . . . I will order my best horses, a sledge, and I will take you for a drive."

"A capital idea! Cousin, you are charming! Mary, do you hear? We shall see him without being obliged to make the three bows. Pani Sobolewska showed mamma—three forward, three backwards . . . very difficult! . . . The Princess Palatine never heard of such . . . at our Court there were only two. . . . We shall bow to the Emperor from the sledge and look into his eyes. He must have dreadful eyes! Then, to-morrow!"

"You must not count on me—I shall leave with my husband in the morning."

"Do not be stubborn! I shall manage your tyrannical husband. But we must arrange the plan of our expedition. Cousin will come to take us for a drive, only you must not betray us. Where shall we go?"

"We shall know that at once, only we must admit somebody into our plot; somebody discreet and well-informed. I have him! Chevalier Gorayski. I shall bring him here at once."

"Victor is charming," said the Princess confidentially, when

Ossolinski left them, not having noticed that Pani Walewska grew pale. "He is very good at keeping a secret; I have tried him. What a pity they think him too young. He is seventeen years old; exactly my age."

Pani Walewska had not time to answer her friend before Ossolinski brought a tall young man, with a sad expression in his big black eyes, and introduced him solemnly—

"Chevalier Gorayski."

"I am very glad," said Jeannette, and having now seen Pani Walewska's embarrassment, she added, "as it seems you have met before."

"Yes, I have had the honour," answered Gorayski, bowing.

"In that case we have a sure ally. There is a plot against the Emperor! Awful! Secret plot. . . . You must take an oath that you will not betray it. Otherwise there will fall upon us the thunderbolts of the wrath of my mother, my cousin's aunt, and the vengeance of Pani Walewska's husband and the anathemas of all the old-fashioned people."

"Will you be kind enough to tell me what the question is about? . . ."

Jeannette burst into hearty laughter at Gorayski's solemnity, and then explained their plan of meeting Napoleon, begging him to help them by his experience.

Gorayski listened patiently, and said that as he belonged to the guard of honour he would be able to conduct them over the bridge, which without him would not be easy for them to pass, as there were a great quantity of stores being brought in for the army. They must not, however, be too late, for Napoleon's habit was always to be before the appointed time.

While the Princess was discussing the details of the excursion with Ossolinski, Gorayski was obliged to turn to Pani Walewska, and he said with an effort—

"Have you been long in Warsaw?"

"We came to-day," answered Pani Walewska, without raising his eyes. "And you?"

"A fortnight since, I left home."

"You have chosen a good opportunity."

"How? I do not understand."

"Well, formerly there was nothing to be done, there was no attraction. . . ."

"Formerly? It seems to me that there was an attraction. I am an egotist when I speak in that way, but who in my place would not be egotistical?"

Pani Walewska blushed.

"One must conquer the egotism and turn one's eyes towards great, sublime things."

"And you, madame, you, Mary, . . . are you happy?"

Pani Walewska shivered.

"You wish me to answer?"

"Yes, I would like to hear it from your lips."

Pani Walewska lifted her shapely head, and said firmly—

"Yes, I am."

Gorayski dropped his head, and said bitterly—

"If it is so, then I am very glad."

"I was certain that such an answer would suffice."

"For it must! Mary, you tremble! Tell me why you contradict your own heart? It seemed to you that the glitter of riches would quench in you the remorse aroused for a broken oath? You have trampled light-heartedly over my happiness, but have you assured your own? Excuse me, for I have no right to talk to you like this, but let me have at least the consolation of knowing that then you were sincere, that then you have . . ."

"Stop!" she interrupted with an effort.

"You are afraid of remorse?"

"No, of memories!"

"I live only by them."

"You are wrong! The roads are open to you, you have hundreds of means for finding consolation and oblivion."

"I do not know how to thank you, madame, for such good advice," answered Gorayski ironically.

"You can sneer if you like, but were I in your place, I would not hesitate a minute . . ."

"You would enlist in the army!" finished Gorayski.

"You have guessed, *Monsieur le Chevalier,* for, perhaps, military service was never before so noble. Look, our whole country was in a lethargy; it seemed as though it was dead; that it

would never wake up for great deeds; that we should listen to German commands for ever; that all our activity would be lost in small deeds, small cares, small pleasures! When there came a conqueror, a hero; he broke the Prussian chains, and resuscitated in us a new life! Shall the Emperor's eagles go as they came? No, the Emperor Napoleon shall be followed by everybody."

"Ah, *chère Marie,* what an ally the Emperor has in you!" resounded suddenly the Princess Jablonowska's voice, who, accompanied by the Chamberlain, came up to the young people.

Pani Walewska shivered, and, having noticed her husband trembling from fatigue, became confused.

The Princess and Ossolinski also seemed to be embarrassed. Gorayski alone kept his wits, and said—

"Pani Walewska is right; we must follow the Emperor."

Princess Jablonowska put her lorgnette on her nose, and, having looked at Gorayski, said with a shade of intentional astonishment—

"Ah! It is Chevalier de Gorayski! I am very pleased. . . . What a political conversation! Anastazy, permit me to introduce to you . . . Chevalier de Gorayski."

Gorayski bowed respectfully to Pan Walewski.

Then the Princess introduced the Chamberlain to the young Princess Radziwil, and subsequently Ossolinski to the Chamberlain.

Pan Walewski mumbled some compliment, and, not being able to overcome the fatigue which was taking hold of him, said to his wife—

"We must be going; it is time!"

Jeannette could not conceal her astonishment, only now understanding that old Walewski was her friend's husband.

Pani Walewska rose silently. Princess Jablonowska tried to excuse her brother.

"*Ma chère Marie,* you know how much I would like you to stay longer, but I do not dare to ask you to stop after such a long and fatiguing journey. Then to-morrow again! . . . Ah, if you could postpone . . ."

"It is impossible!" said Walewski, coughing.

"I wished so much to have you for a longer time. . . ."

"Then you are going to-morrow, Mary?" asked Jeanette Radziwil.

"We must."

"And what will become of your project of driving? Only one day for me. We had agreed to go to-morrow for a drive. . . . *Madame la Princesse* will be kind enough to intercede for me, *auprès de* Monsieur de Walewski."

Princess Jablonowska, wishing to please the young Princess Radziwil, took her side, and seeing in that circumstance a good opportunity to conclude the projected marriage, she whispered a few words into the Chamberlain's ear.

Walewski resisted, for he thought that he would be obliged to go for a drive also; but when Jeannette Radziwil assured him that her mother promised to go with them, he said pompously that it was his duty to fulfil every wish of the young Princess, and promised to postpone his leaving Warsaw.

Jeannette Radziwil thanked him, and Walewski assured her that he would be most happy to be able to please her oftener.

Princess Jablonowska hinted advisedly that it was possible that he might have such an opportunity. In a word, everybody was satisfied, not excepting Ossolinski and Gorayski. Pani Walewska alone was alarmed, seeing yellow spots coming out on her husband's cheeks from under the paint and powder.

Her presentiment proved to be right, for no sooner was he in the carriage, and not obliged to wear the mask of constraint, than he let fly his bad humour.

He complained that he was awfully tired; he abused the Princess Palatine for having forced him to drink a glass of grog, which had given him a bad headache; he reproached his wife, saying that she had forgotten him, and that it was because of her that he could not stay any longer.

This was not the end of the Chamberlain's complaints; at that ball he came to the conclusion that in that *grand monde* he had become a zero; a useless piece of furniture to which nobody paid any attention, whom everybody avoided.

His ambition had permitted him to hope that as soon as he appeared he would be at once asked to take part in confidential debates, that his advice would be asked—but it all turned out quite differently.

Some elderly ladies, remembering Walewski's brilliant past, had listened politely to his commonplace conversation, but the men received him coolly, indifferently. In vain the Chamberlain approached the former Speaker of the Diet, Malachowski, and reminded him of past times spent together. The Speaker hardly troubled himself to answer him; nor was he treated any better by such noblemen as Sobolewski, Wojczynski, Gutakowski, Kochanowski, and Ostrowski; Prince Joseph Poniatowski answered the Chamberlain's respectful bow by a slight inclination of his head only; as for Prince Borghese, he smiled ironically, and having exchanged a few words with his aide-de-camp, said—

"Ah! . . . it is you who have such a young and beautiful wife."

Walewski became confused.

Prince Borghese laughed, seeing Walewski's confusion, and added hastily: "My sincere congratulations! I should like to be introduced to her."

The Chamberlain mumbled a few words of thanks, and then having found his sister, told her that he was going home, and did not try to conceal his dissatisfaction.

Princess Jablonowska guessed the cause of her brother's bitterness, and tried to console him by telling him that there were many people who made an effort to disband the clique whose aim was to monopolise the French Court and to influence the Emperor.

That news brought some consolation to Walewski, but it was not for a long time—as soon as he found himself in the carriage shivering from cold and sleepy from fatigue—that he understood the impotency of an old man. The old courtier's ideas had received a severe blow, and his wounded ambition was not cured either by the thought that the negotiations for his grandson's marriage with Princess Radziwil were successful, nor by his sister's assurance that Walewski had some chances of becoming a member of the future Government.

The Chamberlain wished to live and shine by himself and not by his grandson. His anger not being satisfied with a biting criticism of the new people, of revolutionary princes and dukes, and of lords smelling of the guard-house, turned

towards his wife, who listened silently to his bitter reproaches, not trying even to defend herself.

That submission made him still more angry; therefore, when once back in his mansion, having thrown away his evening dress and wrapped himself in a soft warm dressing-gown, he made up his mind to have some explanation with his wife, and for this purpose he ordered a servant to ask "her ladyship" to come to him.

Pani Walewska came at once, still in evening dress.

Walewski looked her up and down with his lifeless eyes, coughed, and said emphatically—

"I must tell you that we are going to-morrow! Do you understand? I did not come to feast, to go driving! We shall go. Did you hear me? Then there is nobody to associate with . . . not for me are those receptions . . . that mixed society. . . . We are going to Walewice."

"It was so arranged," answered Pani Walewska quietly.

"What was arranged?" cried the Chamberlain. "It is arranged only now! You had a fancy for driving; you shall do so in Walewice. You shall write to the Princess Radziwil and tell her that you are not well."

"I have already written!"

The Chamberlain made a movement of impatience. The desire for quarrelling took the upper hand of him.

"You have written? Well . . . it was proper to ask my advice before doing so."

"You see by yourself that I have guessed your wishes! Jeannette almost forced me to promise to go driving with her. I did not wish it."

"Naturally! How could you when there is the question of my family alliance with the Radziwils? Naturally you would not care for some sacrifice for us. I knew it well. You have an opportunity to win Jeannette for us, but naturally you would not do so. I knew it! Instead of talking with the young Princess, you preferred to listen to Gorayski's idle talk. We know who he is . . . your former lover!"

Pani Walewska grew pale.

"Have you called me in order to accuse me of unjust . . ."

"Unjust!" interrupted Walewski, trembling. "You suppose

so well . . . then we shall stay in Warsaw . . . to-morrow you will go with Jeannette! Do you hear!"

"As you wish."

"You do not like it. You will go. You must do this for Ksawery, for they already say that you do what pleases you with me. We shall leave the day after to-morrow. Give me that salts bottle! Cover me, it is cold here. You should have remembered that my health cannot stand such a journey. But you do not care about it at all. I know! You would like . . . Well, you shall see me dead. Only you must remember that I have some duties, that you shall not take everything, that Ksawery is my principal successor. You come last. Your mother's calculations deceived her!"

Pani Walewska became red—her sad eyes shone.

"You can give your gold to the beggars! I do not care for anything from you, except that you should not insult me."

Walewski was frightened by such energy, or perchance he was moved by the sincerity of his wife's speech, for he changed his tactics at once, and stretched out his hands and whispered hastily—

"Mary! Do not be angry. Sometimes one speaks without meaning. Well, I shall not take my riches to the grave, and instead of leaving them to those who neglect me, I prefer to give them to you. People's talk irritates me. I have nothing against you, and I shall leave everything to you."

Her husband's sudden munificence did not brighten Pani Walewska's beautiful face; on the contrary, more clouds appeared upon it.

Walewski coughed, inhaled salts, and said: "Well, you do not answer."

"I am tired."

"Then I will not keep you. To-morrow you must go with Jeannette! Then we shall see!"

Pani Walewska rose, bent her head over the Chamberlain's, who kissed her noisily, and went to her apartments.

CHAPTER III

IN the front of the inn in Jablonna numerous peasant carts, noblemen's coaches, and military transports gathered from early morning. Notwithstanding that it was a holy day, there was much bustle and unusual excitement such as only happened during a hunt on Prince Poniatowski's estate.

The château, which was covered with snow, was, however, quiet and silent, whilst the overcrowded inn shook with hurrying and noisy people.

On the road from Serock there were whole rows of transports, carts, waggons, and four-in-hand coaches.

All those innumerable vehicles stopped before the inn. Every moment new guests entered the room; some, jingling their swords, asked for fresh horses, swore and abused the host; others talked with military *commissaires,* and then started on their way to Warsaw.

The tintinabulation of sledge bells, the calls from the drivers, squeaking of frozen axle-trees, and loud conversation, produced a deafening noise, full of life and feverish animation. Peasants in homespun rubbed shoulders with military uniforms and noblemen's fur coats.

Those persons standing in the front of the inn questioned the new-comers, and shared the answers with others, sometimes translating from French into Polish.

About noon the road leading to Serock began to clear; there were fewer carts and transport waggons, but the number of coaches increased. These coaches were escorted by cavalry, and officers were sitting on the boxes beside the coachmen. Such coaches sometimes passed the inn, but others stopped and changed horses. The crowd sometimes caught sight through the frost-covered window of a martial face, at another time

a hat adorned with plumes would appear, then the crowd whispered "a Marshal!" and the soldiers and officers would stretch themselves, noblemen would lift their *chapkas,* and the peasants would bow to the ground. At length there were no more coaches.

The recently crowded road was now empty and shining in the sun with snow crystals. Apathy took hold of the crowd. Here and there some one, not being able to stand longer in the cold, went to the inn; others breathed on their hands; others stamped on the ground with their feet to warm them.

On a sudden there resounded on the road the bells of a small sledge conducted by a young man in half-military dress. The sledge glided between vehicles, made a circle in the snow, and stopped in front of the inn. The young man turned to the crowd and asked: "Where is the post-house ostler? Quick!"

A thin man dressed in a sheepskin jacket rushed to the sledge.

"At your service, my lord!"

"The Emperor is coming! have the horses ready! Do you see that coach near the forest? Go!"

The thin man rushed to the stables. The young man in half-military garb whipped up the horses and rushed towards Warsaw.

In the crowd voices were heard calling: "He is coming! he is coming! The Emperor! *L'Empereur arrive! Attention!*"

Several officers and *commissaires* rushed from the inn and began to clear the way, pushing the vehicles and people aside; it was a difficult task, for the officers were followed by men and women who rushed from the inn, crowding the road, and increasing the confusion.

"He is coming! He is coming!" resounded voices louder and louder from all sides.

The eyes of the crowd turned towards a six-horse coach coming on the road from Serock. They just glanced at the long-moustachioed coachman, then at the smart dress of the servants sitting beside him, then tried to penetrate the depths of the dark green coach.

The coach rushed like the wind, the strong horses, with outstretched necks and wide-open nostrils, seemed hardly to touch the ground with their hoofs.

The crowd wavered, and bore without murmuring the blows dealt by the order-making soldiers, not frightened by the swearing officers, but stood solid in one compact powerful body, cemented by one desire, concentrated in one look.

The coach was coming; it was already so near that heads began to uncover, when on a sudden, from the direction of Warsaw, bells resounded noisily, and a sledge, to which were harnessed four dapple-grey horses, rushed through the snow dust directly towards the Emperor's carriage.

The officers tried by gestures to stop the rushing horses, but the young driver, in a costly fur, sitting beside a liveried footman, cracked his whip disregardfully, and went like a storm directly to the inn; and when at last, hearing the enthusiastic shouting of "Long live the Emperor!" he wished to stop the horses, it was too late.

The Emperor's coach stopped, almost touching the sledge, the sledge separating it from the crowd.

"Long live the Emperor!" shouted the crowd.

"*Vive l'Empereur!*" cried the soldiers, and while some one rushed to the Emperor's carriage and hastily took out the horses, others abused the young driver, and tried to push the sledge aside; but the dapple-grey horses, frightened by the shouting and throwing up of *chapkas*, jumped, then threw their heads up and down, and would not permit anyone to come near them.

In the meanwhile, the door of the Emperor's carriage was opened, a good-looking man in a rich military uniform jumped out, noticed the offence at a glance, and said in French to an officer standing outstretched—

"You are on duty here?"

"Yes, sir."

"Come to report to me; a month of prison! Take away the sledge!"

The officer then began to abuse the driver, but at the same time there came from the sledge the melodious voice of a woman. "Will you not be kind enough to excuse us, the most ardent desire to see His Majesty the Emperor brought us here!"

The Marshal politely saluted the talking lady, and said with mild peremptoriness: "You are not guilty. The carelessness

of the officer on duty might have exposed you to danger. The driver must turn to one side."

"He will do it at once, only you must be kind enough to permit me to glance at His Majesty," said another lady with the force of conviction.

"Follow me, please."

The little lady jumped out without the slightest hesitation. The Marshal offered her his arm, not paying any attention to the other young lady who followed them.

"Your name?" asked the Marshal rapidly.

"Madame Walewska," answered the questioned lady with emotion, feeling the sharp penetrating look that was coming towards her from the carriage.

The Marshal stopped before the open door.

"Sire! this lady was daring enough to stop us on our way in order to see your Majesty."

Napoleon leaned forward.

"I am very grateful. You must be as good as you are beautiful! You have caused me true pleasure, a double one, for, in this forlorn spot, I did not expect such a charming apparition."

Pani Walewska, trembling from emotion, lifted her dark, sapphire-like eyes, full of tears, and, having knelt on the step of the carriage, said with enthusiasm: "Sire! you are great! You are our saviour!"

Napoleon seemed to be moved by this unexpected outburst, and, having noticed tears in Pani Walewska's eyes, asked good-naturedly: "You are crying?"

"From happiness, because I see the Emperor."

"I thank you! In your words there sounds such sincerity that I shall remember them! I hope to see you in Warsaw."

The Marshal conducted Pani Walewska to the sledge, and, having once more asked her name, returned to the carriage.

The crowd, not understanding the meaning of all that had happened, and seeing the Emperor's carriage, acclaimed him constantly.

In the meantime, the horses were changed; the Marshal said something to the officer on duty and entered the coach, at the window of which appeared Napoleon's head.

The acclamations increased; the coach rushed towards Warsaw

followed by shouting voices. In the sledge, after a momentary astonishment, there began a mirthful chat.

"Mary," said Jeannette Radziwil, "has he spoken to you? Yes, he did! I heard, but could not catch the words."

"Jeannette," Pani Walewska said, defending herself, "permit me to gather my thoughts; I do not know myself—I am afraid I said something that I should not have said."

"The idea! He was moved! And how he looked at you! But that Marshal was very polite. Cousin, do you know his name?"

"In a moment. We must first get on the road—get away!" shouted Ossolinski, sitting on the coachman's box.

"John, take the reins. Let us get out from here as soon as we can. They might stop us. Look, that officer is rushing towards us."

"John, turn into the field!" cried Jeannette Radziwil, having noticed that actually the officer, who was on duty and who was scolded by the Marshal, was making his way through the crowd towards the sledge.

"Hasten! hasten!" cried Pani Walewska.

John took the reins from Ossolinski, whipped up the horses, and turned across the field. The sledge rushed madly towards Warsaw.

Pani Walewska breathed freely.

"Thank God, we are safe!"

"What would they do? You have spoken with the Emperor himself!"

"They would not dare!" affirmed Ossolinski.

"Tell us now how was it? My dear, do; I heard him say, *Vous pleurez!* I had also tears in my eyes; I do not know why. Well, tell us."

Pani Walewska, with a voice full of emotion, related the details of the conversation. Jeannette was beside herself with satisfaction.

"Do you know, Mary, I did not expect such an end. Well, we have succeeded with our expedition. The Princess Palatine is certain that we are somewhere near Ujazdow. Wrap yourself up, for it is cold—and we were talking with Napoleon! How has it happened? I spoke first to the Marshal; he answered

very politely. But imagine to yourself how it confused me. Then he offered you his arm. While you were talking I wanted to thrust my head in and shout: 'Your Majesty, I also deserved at least one word.' What would he have said to that? You have not any idea how that Marshal was looking at me. Ha! ha! ha! What an adventure!"

"I did not fancy that Marshal," said Ossolinski.

"For you did not look at him closely; I saw both of them well. I tell you, Mary, the Emperor's nose was red, almost blue. The cold dares to touch even an Emperor's nose. Ha! ha! ha! He wore a fur coat over his uniform, and such big gloves! What a pity he has no moustache; it is the fashion now to have them."

Ossolinski raised his hand and began to pull his down.

Jeannette continued to joke and laugh.

"If my mother or Madame Louise could have seen us then! Mary, pull that fur. That Marshal must be one of importance; he drives with the Emperor."

"I do not think so," rejoined Ossolinski. "The question is, whether he is a Marshal."

"Do not contradict me; I heard the officer distinctly giving him that rank."

"But what is his name? I have seen Davoust, he is much older. It must be Lannes, then."

"Suffice it he is a Marshal. You must listen and remember with whom you have to do. Mary spoke with Napoleon, I with Lannes, and you with only a captain! Emperor, Marshal, and captain! Ha! ha! ha! We have seen the Emperor before all the other ladies. I heard yesterday when Pani Sobolewska proposed to the Countess Potocka to go on the bridge and wait his coming there. Then it was doubtful if they would be able to see him because of the crowd. Gorayski said that they expected the Emperor about dusk. But I shall not mind a scolding! John, hurry up! What a meeting! As if we had agreed with the Emperor! And you, Mary! Why do you not say something?"

Pani Walewska wrapped her head in the fur still closer, and said, evasively, "Cold."

"Cousin," the Princess said to young Ossolinski scoldingly,

"you have no respect for the ladies. Do you not see that the fur has slipped from her knees."

Ossolinski turned from the box and began to pull up the bear's skin, but suddenly, having looked behind the sledge, trembled so much that he nearly fell into the snow.

"What is the matter with you?"

"We are pursued!" he cried, regaining his equilibrium.

Jeannette and Pani Walewska turned back, and perceived in the distance the same captain galloping at the head of a detachment of dragoons.

"John, for God's sake whip up the horses!" cried Pani Walewska, awfully frightened.

"If we can only reach Warsaw," said Jeannette.

The coachman cracked the whip. The dapple-grey horses went at full gallop.

The captain with the dragoons began to drop behind. Pani Walewska breathed freely. Ossolinski smiled triumphantly.

"They cannot keep up with us, and even if they should, what could they do to us?"

"I do not know why, but I am afraid of them."

"Mary, my cousin is right. That captain only wished to frighten us. Look! ah, he is gaining fast on us again! It is strange; we have not done anything wrong. If anyone is guilty of anything, it must be Chevalier Ossolinski."

"I? Why must it be I?"

"Well, you wanted to drive us, and you rushed impetuously at the Emperor's carriage."

"But you told me to hasten. John, whip up the horses!"

"They fly like birds, my lord."

"Shall we escape?"

"I don't think so—the wheelers slacken already."

The coachman was right, the tired horses began to throw up their hoofs heavily, and grew indifferent to the cracking of the whip; they were steaming like engines.

In the meantime, the captain and his dragoons were approaching to the great fright of all.

John whipped up the horses once more, and they were able to trot several furlongs further, and then could only go very slowly, panting and coughing.

The captain reached the sledge, saluted the driving party with an exquisite politeness, and, having done this, retreated with his dragoons behind the sledge, and went on the same pace as the dapple-grey four-in-hand.

Seeing the captain's peaceful disposition, Jeannette and Pani Walewska recovered their courage.

"Do you see, Mary, he is a very courteous fellow! He saluted us! and we were frightened!"

"H'm! we do not know yet," said Ossolinski gloomily.

"What! why should we not know?"

"He follows us."

"Then what? The road belongs to everybody."

"And it seems to me that he only escorts us."

"Cousin! What are you talking about! Where to?"

"Very simple, nowhere else but to the guard-house."

"It cannot be! It cannot be."

"We can assure ourselves immediately! Let John go faster, and then slacken."

The coachman did as he was told.

They all watched the captain, who, as soon as the dapple-grey horses went faster, galloped after them. The sledge slackened, the captain did not pass it, but went at the trot.

The coachman repeated the same manœuvre a couple of times, and every time the captain neither permitted himself to be distanced nor did he remain behind.

Pani Walewska and Jeannette Radziwil were distressed at this discovery, Ossolinski tried to put a good face on a bad affair.

In the meanwhile, in the distance, over the snow-covered plain, Warsaw appeared.

The driving party grew more courageous, the more so as the captain permitted himself to be outdistanced by the sledge, and followed it only from afar.

Jeannette began to laugh at her own fears, but suddenly another fright came.

This time Ossolinski gave the alarm.

"It is very late," said he; "my mother will be very angry with me for not having paid the New Year visits."

"What time is it now?"

"Three o'clock."

"Ah! I am sure the Princess Palatine has sent at least three outriders after me; they are looking for us in Ujazdow, while we are coming from the audience with the Emperor!"

"Jeannette, remember and do not betray me."

"I betray you, my dear!"

"My husband does not know anything; he would take it amiss."

"Yes, such a husband!" burst out Jeannette. But having noticed Pani Walewska's confusion, she added immediately: "None of them would like it. I know it. Is it not true, cousin?"

"Why? To talk with the Emperor? It is a great honour!"

"It is true," interrupted Pani Walewska; "at any rate, for my sake, not a word to anybody. We will say——"

"That a wheel broke," rejoined Jeannette.

"Yes," continued Ossolinski. "John, do you hear? Should you be questioned, say that one of the wheels broke."

"I understand, my lord; only, we are in a sledge."

"Ah! it is true."

"Then say that we had some accident, that is all."

"Only, Jeannette, dear," rejoined Pani Walewska, "do not say a word to anybody about our excursion and meeting."

"Not to anybody?" asked the Princess, with sadness in her voice.

"They would gossip about it; you know how it is; you remember what you told me yesterday, or rather it was your Chevalier."

"I did not intend to hurt your feelings."

"Mary, I swear to you that I did not know that story about grandmother and grandson . . . let me kiss you! I shall not tell a word to anybody except Madame Louise. I would say a few words, but in such a way that she will not be able to guess."

"Jeannette, if you love me."

"But you do not know Madame Louise; she knows how to keep a secret. My mother tells her everything. Madame Louise repeats only to me sometimes, to nobody else."

"Jeannette, do this for me. What would they say? They

would blame me alone. Princess Jablonowska would never forgive me!"

"But you have spoken with the Emperor!"

"It does not matter. I should be ashamed of myself. I do not know myself. Well, promise."

"If you wish it so much," said Jeannette sadly.

"And you also, *Monsieur le Chevalier.*"

"I! Naturally! *Parole d'honneur!*"

"To nobody a word."

"Well, I gave my word," answered Ossolinski proudly, pulling the down on his upper lip.

The sledge arrived at the bridge; they showed their pass and were allowed to enter the town.

Jeannette looked backwards to assure herself that the captain did not follow them, and perceiving that he remained with his dragoons far in the distance, became satisfied altogether.

The friends exchanged last words. Jeannette promised to come to Walewice, and Pani Walewska said that she would visit Jeannette in Warsaw at her first opportunity.

The sledge turned from Bednarska to Krolewska Street, and stopped before the Princess Palatine's mansion.

Jeannette kissed Pani Walewska once more, swore to keep the secret, and together with Ossolinski disappeared under the arch of the *porte cochère.*

John turned to Dluga Street.

The Chamberlain's wife was returning home sad. Even the picture of the meeting with the Emperor disappeared together with his kind words, and there remained only the feeling that she must again return to the worry of her ordinary life; that the moment of freedom was already gone, perchance for ever; that she would be obliged to quench her vivacity and to be a dignified mistress of the house to please her capricious and sour husband.

Something like bitterness took hold of her, bitterness towards those who did not allow her to breathe freely according to the wants of youth, who robbed her early of her dreams, who had forced her to marry a man so different to her in age, taste, liking, ideas, and ideals.

Pani Walewska remembered the past with horror.

When the Chamberlain began to court her and bring her magnificent presents, she did not realise the meaning of all that was going on, nor what a future awaited her. Only the day of the wedding she woke up and understood the gloomy reality. She did not want to be married; she threw herself at her mother's feet; it was too late.

Notwithstanding her beseeching and tears, they forced her to pronounce the oath. Then sad days followed, awfully monotonous, full of the Chamberlain's recriminations, insulting suspicions and accusations. Had she given any reason for them? Gorayski alone seemed to love her. He alone. But as soon as he learned about the projected marriage, he threw at her bitter words and left her. Then yesterday, he seemed to remember her, to be angry with her. Why?

She was fond of him; he was only her dear brother Paul's friend! Why did he leave her?

If Paul had been with her, had he not entered the Polish Legions under Napoleon, he would have defended her! And now, she must play a comedy even for him; she must lie to him, for why should she make him sad? It was done, and could not be changed.

Pani Walewska looked sadly at the street full of animation; she did not notice that several people driving in sledges and carriages bowed to her; she felt like a convict, who, having escaped from prison and having tasted freedom, is caught again and led to his cell; a prisoner, who is conducted through the streets, does not recognise people, does not notice carriages, does not understand shouts, and sees only the large wave of life rolling joyfully, a wave going away from him.

The sledge stopped in front of the mansion. A servant rushed out.

The Chamberlain's wife shook off her gloomy thoughts, pushed aside a tress of hair which, having escaped from under her fur cap, was kissing her lovely face flushed by the cold, and said to John, "Return the sledge to Count Ossolinski, and should there be any inquiries, then you remember."

"Yes, my lady."

Pani Walewska turned towards the *porte cochère*. She was going to pass the threshold, when she noticed the captain, who

had followed her, and a few steps further were his dragoons, talking with the valet Baptiste.

That sight disturbed her; she wanted to speak to the captain, but he, having noticed the effect his presence made on her, hurriedly retreated.

Pani Walewska stopped, inhaled the air, and entered the mansion.

CHAPTER IV

THE same day the Chamberlain, after a sleepless night, awoke to see the sun shining on the frost-covered windows. A short but sound sleep refreshed him, and he took a cup of chocolate with a sense of pleasure, glanced through the *Gazette Correspondant*, listened to the solemn New Year wishes from the servants, headed by Baptiste, and then, remembering his wife, he made a grimace.

"Her ladyship has gone?" he asked of a lackey.

"Yes, my lord."

"And she has not yet returned?"

"The carriage came back empty, my lord."

"And Joseph?"

"Joseph remained with her ladyship."

The Chamberlain felt angry with himself for having given in to that goose yesterday.

The weather was bright, one could return to Walewice. Add to all this it was New Year's day, and impossible to visit anybody. For should he call on two or three people he would be obliged to see everybody, and he was not at all certain how he would be received.

The Chamberlain grew bitter as he remembered past times. On former New Year's days the King would never let him go, and therefore he was only able to call upon the most prominent people, such as the Castelan of Cracow, and the Primate, and others. How different it was now! Poniatowski hardly nodded to him last night. The day was lost to him, obliged to stay, as he was, in that lonely palace, where he had not even that comfortable armchair which had been left in Walewice, or the extensive surroundings upon which he was wont to gaze; he had not even his favourite dog to bear him company.

About noon the Chamberlain began to dress, listening patiently to the stories with which his valet considered it his duty to regale his master, and which the latter knew long ago by heart. In the middle of one his son was announced.

The Chamberlain put on a warm, comfortable dressing-gown, and went forward to meet Pan Ksawery.

"I thought you did not know I was remaining here for another day. What brings you to me?"

"The Princess told me last night; as soon as I heard I considered it my duty to call."

"Take a chair. Will you lunch with me?"

"No, I thank you."

The hardly begun conversation was stopped suddenly. Pan Ksawery played with the buttons of his coat; the Chamberlain turned his snuff-box between his fingers and looked askance at his son, wondering inwardly how it could be that his son appeared so old. This thought was so strong that the Chamberlain could not conceal it.

"You are not looking well."

"I?" answered Pan Ksawery, surprised. "Well—old age."

"The idea!"

"Soon sixty!"

The Chamberlain grew red.

"Exactly, and for such an age you are not looking well. Your son Kazimierz—what is he doing? and the second—Joseph?"

"He thinks of entering the army."

"Noble calling."

"They say that nowadays a military man can rise to any height, even to that of an emperor."

"Do not talk in that way. Joseph must have something certain, and if he wishes to enter the army you must procure him at least a colonel's rank. Pepi should help you in that."

"I did take some steps, but he sent me to General Dombrowski. I did not even try him."

"I think not."

"If one could get a commission at a price, then who knows?"

"Well, if you have money, then do it."

Pan Ksawery sighed.

"It would be very difficult for me just now."

"And you think that it would not be difficult for me? You had better stay in your country seat as I do, for it is all of no use to-day. Have influence? Any man such as Wybicki succeeds. Go to your country seat as I said. But I suppose your wife would prefer . . ."

"You know that we must stay here for the sake of Kazimierz's projected marriage. There would be no obstacles if it were not for the Ossolinskis, but we count much on your wife, who, as it seems, is a great friend of the young Princess Radziwil's; she even intended to go driving with her to-day."

"Yes, she has gone—it was for that reason we remained one day longer."

"I am very grateful, only Ossolinski's presence would be in the way."

"I do not understand."

"Our footman saw by accident Pani Walewska driving with Ossolinski and the young Princess Radziwil. I wonder that the Princess's mother allowed it."

The Chamberlain frowned.

"Why should there be any question about permission? My wife is there; it suffices."

Pan Ksawery grew surprised at his father's severity, and turned the conversation to the current events, but he met with such angry answers that he rose, and, having repeated his own and his family's good wishes, took his leave.

The Chamberlain thanked him, returned the wishes, and said something that in case of an alliance with the Radziwils he would take on himself the wedding expenses.

When Pan Ksawery left, the Chamberlain rang for a servant and asked whether "her ladyship" had returned. Receiving a negative answer he became very angry. The conversation with his son increased his irritation. He had made the effort to mend his relations with him, but he had been unsuccessful.

According to the Chamberlain, Pan Ksawery had neither his father's ambition, good taste, nor good manners. He was living in Warsaw, and had not succeeded in getting a Government appointment, although his road was opened to him by his social position, and his large estates, and by his father's splendour,

not to speak of his grandfather and great-grandfather. For the Chamberlain was one of the oldest knights of the White Eagle Order, and he was appointed a Chamberlain without even being obliged to win over to his side the King's valet, Ryx.

Then he remembered what his son said about Pani Walewska's driving. The Chamberlain had rebuked it, but he felt uneasy about it all the same.

A drive with a youth without a chaperon, and that, too, with Ossolinski, who had tried to win the Princess Radziwil.

The Chamberlain looked at the clock; it was two.

Baptiste had already announced that lunch was ready; the Chamberlain told him to wait, and every little while asked if "her ladyship" had returned. He ordered the clock to be put on a table in front of him; he watched its hands going round slowly, and rapped at the cover of his snuff-box.

In that state Princess Jablonowska found him, and seeing her brother's bad temper she began by sympathising with him.

"*Mon cher ami!* . . . I was just driving by; I was returning from the Countess Stanislaus Potocka and I thought of you, *cher ami*, that you are all alone. Where is Mary?"

"She went with Jeannette, and has not yet come back."

"Ah! it is true! I had forgotten about it. *Elle te néglige*, but she could not return yet; I am sure she could not."

"What! from a short drive?"

"Not so short! I have just met the Count Thomas Lubienski; he belongs to the guard of honour that was to meet the Emperor; the Emperor came back about an hour ago. Well, then, Thomas Lubienski told me that he met Ossolinski's sledge on the bridge in the direction of Praga."

"Ossolinski's sledge?"

"Yes; Mary and Jeannette were with him."

"It is impossible."

"There is no doubt about it. Chevalier de Gorayski accompanied them on horseback."

"You are joking."

"*Mon cher*, Thomas would not lie. And then there is nothing very terrible in that, for Gorayski has already returned to Warsaw; I saw him at the Potockis'."

"This surpasses all limits. . . . I cannot allow such things.

I must stop that. To-morrow—to-day even—we shall leave. . . . I ought never to have come here."

"*Mon pauvre,* do not reproach yourself—it grieves me. It is simply chance. . . . Marie is young, and without experience of life. I do not suspect her of anything bad—she is unwise, that is all. She cannot move without giving occasion for comment—that talk about grandmother and grandson——"

"What talk?"

"Do not mind it—it is only a trifle; country people gossip. . . . You will take her to Walewice and everything will be forgotten.'

The Princess stopped suddenly, for she was frightened at seeing the Chamberlain tremble all over, as if shaken by a fever.

"O Lord! I have upset you! But you must not mind it so much. Time will cure many things. She is not guilty. Her education. . . . My dear Anastazy, try to overcome your irritation, it might hurt you. . . . I have seen Gorayski only a short time ago, therefore they must have met just for a few minutes . . . perhaps they did not even have a chance to talk . . . I will find out through Jeannette, only be calm."

"But . . . I am not irritated," mumbled the Chamberlain.

"Don't tell me that. . . . I know you must have been hurt. . . . Do not deny it. . . . I understand. But you have been prepared for some anxiety. . . . I have always been against this marriage. . . . I had no confidence in Marie. Her modesty and her taciturnity shocked me. . . . Now you will have to take her away, for, as you know, there will be some gossip, and the Princess Dominik will break off the negotiations. . . . She will be bound to do so. . . ."

"Leave that to me."

"I never meddle with your affairs. When Thomas told me about it I was ashamed, but I pretended that I did not understand. Then, when are you going back to Walewice?"

"To-day—to-morrow—immediately! There is no need for me to be here. The whole of Warsaw is nothing to me. I do not care either for your reception or for society from the other end of the world. Such society does not interest me."

The Princess nodded convincingly.

"My dear Anastazy! And what can I say? I am bored

myself by these people. After the Prussians were driven away, they came out from all the dark corners and fought for positions. After Carnival I am going to Vienna. The Prince de Ligny has written twice to me. I would go sooner, but I pity Ksawery's wife—the marriage would fail without me, for I am *très bien* with the Princess Dominik. . . ."

The Chamberlain rapped his snuff-box and was silent. The Princess was hurt by it.

"You do not take any interest in all that," she finished, bitingly.

The Chamberlain moved in his armchair.

"I do not take any interest in anything," he burst out angrily. "Let Ksawery do what he likes, I do not care about it. I have given him a good family name, influence at Court, estates — he has squandered all. Let him suffer now—I do not wish to hear of anything! I return to Walewice immediately. I have been bothered enough."

"Yes; but one must think about the equipment of his son."

"He has a father, let him do it."

"Ksawery was obliged to mortgage his estate. . . . Now he has not to trouble himself about the debts, for the Prussians are driven away; but should the new Government put things straight, then he will be ruined."

"Let him seek favour with the new Government then, so as not to be pressed for payment."

"But how? You have no idea about the situation. It is difficult to make out who rules. They say that the Emperor promised the Polish crown to Murat. It would be very easily done with Napoleon. We may have a king taken from the mob. Prince Joseph Poniatowski has lost all influence. Prince Borghese promised Madame de Vauban that he would speak to the Emperor about Ksawery, but as it seems he himself is not in very good odour with Napoleon, at least, so says Constant, *valet de chambre de l'Empereur*, a kind of Ryx of our last king. In a word, it is a muddle; who can should wait until everything becomes clear. My dear Anastazy, I do hope you will remember poor Casimir, *il est très bien*. I am enjoying his marriage in anticipation! Excuse me for having bothered you."

"Not at all."

"I know it tries you! But it would be worse if you were obliged to move amongst these people. I hope that everything will go right. I shall write to you at once to Walewice should anything of importance happen. The Princess Dominik Radziwil likes you very much; she said to me that you are *toujours le même.* She is right. If you only had not that trouble with Marie. Kiss her for me. Then, *au revoir.* I shall be so happy to be able to send the newly-married couple to be blessed at Walewice. Do not think about that other matter; it is done. The people will soon forget it, provided you do not give them occasion to remember it."

At last the Chamberlain found himself alone; he breathed freely, wiped the perspiration from his forehead, and having asked his lackey if his wife had returned, ordered his dinner to be served. But he had no appetite, the courses were taken away untouched, notwithstanding Baptiste's recommendation.

From irritation the Chamberlain passed to apathy, which was so strong that when the valet told him that Pani Walewska had returned, he only shrugged his shoulders and remained motionless.

Baptiste, knowing his master well, left him alone.

Thus several hours passed away. In the room the dusk had already begun to lay its shadows, the fire in the grate shining more and more redly, catching a glint from the paling brightness of the sceptre yielded by vanishing day, when the Chamberlain woke up, rubbed his eyes, and began to think what steps he should take with regard to his wife's levity, whether to have an explanation with her at once, or to postpone it until they returned to Walewice, and for the present to assume an attitude of contempt and indifference.

The first thought dominated him.

The Chamberlain stretched out his hand in order to ring for a lackey and tell him to summon Pani Walewska, when suddenly there rushed into his room his valet Baptiste.

"What is it?"

"His Excellency, Monsieur de Talleyrand Périgord, Prince of Benevento."

The Chamberlain jumped from his chair.

"Who?"

"The Prince of Benevento wishes to see you, my lord."

The Chamberlain was moved as by an electric current at the news. Hastily he put on his grey evening dress, not forgetting the ribbon of the Order, and went to the blue drawing-room, where Talleyrand was waiting for him.

The Prince of Benevento received with graciousness the Chamberlain's welcome, in which was mingled a question as to the honour done to him, and an allusion to the effect that he did not doubt M. de Talleyrand's amiability; and when Pan Walewski finally was seated opposite him, the Frenchman said, with exquisite politeness: "You must forgive me my late call, due to the news that you are going to leave Warsaw to-morrow."

"I have some pressing business."

"What a pity, for just now the town has great attractions. The Emperor proposes to stay here for a time longer. The sun rises, the stars should not leave their positions. . . ."

The Chamberlain glanced at his star of the Order, and said in a melancholy tone: "It should be so . . . but to-day there are new people, I mean to say younger . . . they regret our most gracious king less. We old servants of Stanislaus are more comfortable in the quiet of our homes."

"You seem to disdain our national cry, '*Le Roi est mort, vive le Roi!*' Is it not true that to a new ruler those who carried the burden of his predecessor's throne are dear? How can the old times return if those who were formerly at the head withdraw?"

"Very kind opinion. . . ."

"Not at all. I should like, however, to persuade you to give up your idea of going back to the country. To a man of your merit there are very wide fields open. Who should be placed at the head if not people like you?"

The Chamberlain was beaming with satisfaction. He looked more and more kindly at the Prince of Benevento, who appeared not to notice the impression his words made on his host. Then, wishing to conquer him entirely, he said abruptly: "The Emperor was to-day asking about you."

The Chamberlain shivered. He sat upright in his chair, and whispered timidly: "The Emperor? How could I have deserved such a favour?"

"You must not forget that one of the qualities which made

the Emperor what he is now was the art of knowing people, of penetrating them. . . . I will tell you more. The Emperor deigned not only to ask about you, but he also expressed the wish to see you at the reception in the Castle."

"His Majesty's wish is a command to me."

"I am very happy to be able to repeat to his Majesty your words, and I hope that Madame Walewska will be kind enough to accompany you."

"If only her health will permit her."

"Then she is not well?"

"Yes . . . she is not very strong."

"Only the most prominent people will have the honour to be invited with their wives. If, then, *Madame votre épouse* cannot come . . . ?"

"Oh, she is only temporarily indisposed," said the Chamberlain hastily.

"I thought so," said Talleyrand, with a malicious smile. "The Grand Marshal of the Court will not fail to send you an invitation for all receptions and balls, and I am certain that you will allow your wife to mingle with that select circle of people who will have the honour to be presented to his Majesty."

"I should not try to excuse myself, though . . . truly, my wife is temporarily not well."

"Is it possible? Yesterday, if I am not mistaken, she was at the reception of the Princess . . . ?"

"Yes; but an indisposition obliged her to leave early."

"It would be a great pity if both of you were not able to take part . . . for in that case, truly, I do not know who would give the Emperor a good idea of the capital, famous for its chivalrous nobility and the beauty of its women. Pray do not embarrass Duroc."

The Chamberlain could hardly keep still in his chair.

"It would be impossible to resist such arguments, pronounced with such eloquence. Moreover, I am glad to see that your renown was not over-estimated, for I know that from hearing about your great merits. I had conceived for you the highest respect, much more so from the fact that I consider the family of Périgord one of the oldest among those of which France can boast."

Talleyrand reddened at this implied compliment. Under the brilliant uniform of Napoleon's minister there ran the blood of a once independent nobleman. The Prince of Benevento extended his gold snuff-box to the Chamberlain, who in return proffered him his own, as rich and as beautifully chased.

"Beautiful!" said Talleyrand.

"A present from the best of kings," answered the Chamberlain modestly; and looking at his guest's snuff-box, asked politely: "And yours?"

"A present from the most unfortunate of kings," answered M. de Périgord sentimentally, and sighed.

The Chamberlain did the same.

Talleyrand became thoughtful, and then he said after a while, returning to the interrupted conversation, but from another point: "The times change, the rulers change also. It is a pleasure to find among our new men such people as you, therefore you must not deprive us of that pleasure. I am sure that many things must shock such a man as you, but be assured that there are people among us able to respect the blood of Roman patricians that is in you. We are under the constellation of Mars, therefore any rifle is of importance. . . ."

The Chamberlain, altogether blinded by the deference shown him, permitted himself to make a few ironical remarks directed against those men in Warsaw who assumed the rôle of leaders, although they had no right either by birth or by merit; and whose arrogance drove away from the throne those who had supported it, and had carried the burden of representation of the state from generation to generation.

The Prince of Benevento answered in the same tone, directing his sting against those who at least began to understand that officers and marshals can be created, but that to wear the coronet of a prince one must be born a nobleman.

After a further exchange of sentiments agreeable to both, Talleyrand, conducted to the ante-chamber by the Chamberlain, took his leave, and departed.

The Chamberlain rushed into his wife's apartments.

Pani Walewska had been told by her maid of her husband's frequent inquiries concerning her absence; now at the sight of him she grew pale, expecting an avalanche of reproaches. But

the Chamberlain was so completely taken up with the conversation he had just had that he forgot even the memory of his former irritation.

The Chamberlain was dominated by one thought, the thought of the Emperor who remembered him, who had not dared to neglect him, but who undoubtedly told Talleyrand to make the first advances . . . and notwithstanding—of this he was certain—the intriguing of the Poniatowskis. The Chamberlain, however, had such an exalted opinion of himself, that while rejoicing he tried to appear indifferent. Therefore he greeted his wife by a slight movement of his head, glanced at her face flushed by the cold, asked whether she had had her dinner, and then, tapping energetically on the lid of his snuff-box, he rose on tiptoe, and said negligently: "Monsieur de Périgord called on me."

Pani Walewska raised her eyebrows and looked at her husband in astonishment.

"Talleyrand de Périgord, the Prince of Benevento," added the Chamberlain.

"He called on you?"

"Why not? They are trying to win me over to their side. They have come to the conclusion that they must have with them some one of greater importance than Wybicki and Dombrowski. . . . Talleyrand is a very clever man. . . . I told them what I thought they ought to know, that, notwithstanding the war, they cannot afford to quarrel with the old families, or to make senators of the mob."

Pani Walewska looked at her husband so strangely that he resented it, and said: "Why are you looking as if I were a madman?"

"It is not that, but I do not understand what you are talking about."

"I told you that Talleyrand had called on me."

"The Emperor's minister?"

"Therefore not too big a man to call on Colonna Walewski."

"What was the object of his visit?"

"He learned that I was still in Warsaw, and came with New Year wishes—of course, not by his own impulse. Strictly speaking, he wished to find out whether I would accept an invitation

to a reception at the Castle. I could hardly refuse. Do you understand? The Emperor wishes to have on his side some one of greater importance than Gutakowski and Wojczynski. Well, I must sacrifice myself, that is all. John must go to Walewice to bring a few more servants and furniture; we must make some changes here, for we shall be obliged to receive. You must look to your frocks. I do not like the trouble, but I must make some sacrifices for my country. No, I cannot excuse myself; I should be called an egotist."

Pani Walewska at such a speech was still more surprised than before.

"Then what do you propose to do?"

The Chamberlain coughed, and tugged at the ribbon of his Order.

"Do you think that I shall join Dombrowski's regiments? What shall I do? The Emperor calls me to his side, consequently I must join him. Do you understand?"

"But the Court life . . . ?"

"You cannot tell me anything I do not know about Court life. I am familiar with every corner in the Castle, and there is not a path in the park surrounding the Lazienki Palace that I have not walked on. Do you think that such a man as Napoleon troubles about such things? He needs Walewski, that is all. But Walewski will not be satisfied with any paltry office; he does not bring his experience into the service to be subordinate to anyone but the Emperor himself."

"Will your health not suffer?"

"What a sudden anxiety! The only kind of life that can do me any harm is the monotonous, solitary life. You seem to think that I do not care for anything but Walewice. We shall stay here."

"I do not wish for anything better myself."

"Aha . . . you like the idea . . . you think that you can go out driving every day, then. . . . Where have you been?"

Pani Walewska became confused.

"We went out with Jeannette."

"What an innocent excuse! And what about Praga and Ossolinski?"

"He joined us. . . . Jeannette's mother . . ."

"And Gorayski?"

"He conducted us over the bridge, otherwise we could not have passed."

"But you did not need to pass the bridge."

"We wanted to see the Emperor."

The Chamberlain was appeased at once.

"Well, there was no need for haste. . . . And did you see him?"

"Yes, while he was passing," said Pani Walewska evasively.

"Did you like him?"

"Yes."

"I should think so! Such an Emperor! Only, for the future, be wise, and never give an opportunity for slander. I do not wish to reproach you, only I advise you to be prudent. But how was it that Ossolinski was with you?"

"He is Jeannette's cousin and admirer."

"He begins early. And did you find out how Jeannette is disposed towards Kazimierz?"

"I did not have an opportunity. . . It was impossible while Ossolinski was with us."

"Well, never mind. Princess Radziwil will soon try to catch my grandson for her daughter. To-morrow morning we shall call on Princess Jablonowska; she must advise where to order your frocks. I will pay all your bills. I shall send to Walewice to-day, for as we shall be receiving we might be short of silver. Tell John what cases he is to bring. . . . I will attend to the wine."

The Chamberlain strutted about the room, sat down, and then rose again, opened and closed his snuff-box, and made grander and grander plans, so that by the time he felt sleepy he had decided to bring from Walewice the whole retinue of servants, several horses and carriages, besides a great many other things.

His wife tried to dissuade him from doing so, but her arguments only induced him to give the order at once, and he was very much irritated at her remark that she, for her part, did not care for Court life.

The Chamberlain burst out: "Do you think that just for your caprices I shall refuse to serve my country, that I shall

repulse M. de Périgord, that I, Colonna Walewski, I—shall live in the country like any *gentillâtre?*"

But Pani Walewska would not allow herself to be rebuked.

"You yourself made me accustomed to such a life; you forbade me to see people; I did not oppose you, for I was not tempted by the *réunions*. . . . You would not allow me to receive even our nearest relations. . . ."

"Yes, such as Gorayski! And such madcaps as Kozietulski, Jerzmanowski, and your brother, that crowd who dragged me pretty nearly into a conflict with the Prussian Government. You are to do as I say; I shall bring no disgrace upon my name. Well, if you wish to know something more, let me tell you that the Emperor asked about me."

"The Emperor!" repeated Pani Walewska.

"Nothing wonderful in that. Formerly, a king could not have got along without me, and now the Emperor."

Pani Walewska thought that her husband was merely bragging, so she determined to be silent, and to wait patiently. At that moment a lackey appeared in the doorway carrying a silver tray, on which rested a large bouquet and a letter.

The Chamberlain frowned.

"From whom?" asked he.

"I do not know, my lord . . . a footman brought it."

"Give me the letter, and bring me my glasses—quick!"

The lackey put down the tray and the flowers on a table near the door.

The Chamberlain looked angrily by turns first at the letter, on which in wax was impressed some coat-of-arms, and then at his wife's blushing face.

"This is the last touch! Flowers! We shall find out the truth presently! What a success you have obtained in one day!"

The lackey entered with the spectacles.

"Bring me the light here."

The Chamberlain looked at the letter, addressed to him in French.

He cleared his throat, broke the seal, and glanced at the contents of the letter; he cleared his throat again, brought the letter nearer to the light, and motioned the lackey to leave. Then he read the letter again, and approached the bouquet; he

took it up carefully, and, beaming with content, glided towards his wife, kissed her small hand noisily, and, presenting it to her, said caressingly—

"Accept this with compliments from me."

"But where from?"

"The Grand Marshal of the Court sends it," said the Chamberlain, making an effort to keep calm.

"You are joking. . . ."

"Read the note! What a clever fellow; he knows who it is that deserves respect and something more."

Pani Walewska did not pay any attention to her husband's boasting; she was reading the letter, which was indeed very short, containing only a few lines concerning the impossibility of visiting the Walewskis previous to it, owing to their tardy arrival in Warsaw, and announcing that the writer would call on them the next day, and meanwhile begged Pani Walewska to accept the accompanying flowers as a token of goodwill for the New Year.

Pani Walewska touched the bouquet, and said hesitatingly: "The Grand Marshal of the Court. . . . Such an unexpected honour. . . . I do not know the meaning of it. . . ."

The Chamberlain puffed out his flabby cheeks, cleared his throat, and balancing himself on his tiptoes, said emphatically: "It is not the Grand Marshal; it is the Emperor."

Pani Walewska shivered.

"What makes you suppose so?"

"The Grand Marshal is only allowed to favour those whom the Emperor favours. And the best proof . . . the Emperor asked after us, the Marshal hastens to make himself agreeable. Duroc will be followed by Murat, Murat by Borghese, Borghese by Davoust, or some other . . . in a word, the whole Court. There is no doubt about it. Some French nobleman must have told Napoleon, for during the reign of our last king we were in continual relations with the principal French families. Such men as Duroc carried parcels for us then! But what is the matter with you? *Vous êtes decouragée, Madame.* What an idea! He is an agreeable man, nothing else. If he does this, it is not without some benefit to himself, for they have to form a new governing body. It is not yet known who will be at the head

of it; the Emperor's choice has not been made public. Poniatowski's adherents tremble . . . it is quite uncertain. The time will come. . . . It will come."

The Chamberlain, in order to emphasise his words, stretched himself out to his utmost, but quicker still he bent and clutched at his knee. The terrible pain that shot through it cooled his enthusiasm, and reminded him forcibly of gout and old age.

"It is cold here! You have no fire! Always something contrary to my liking. We must rise early to-morrow; there are a good many orders to be given. . . . Then the Princess, and Duroc . . . what a lot there will be to do! for I must at least leave my visiting card on Talleyrand. We shall spend the evening at home. Pray, help me to the door!"

Pani Walewska took her husband's arm and helped him to his apartments, where she left him in Baptiste's hands, and then returned to her boudoir.

CHAPTER V

AS a result of these emotions the Chamberlain got a fever which bothered him much more, for it reminded him of the impotence of old age at the moment when the future seemed to announce to him the return of the most glorious past times.

He would be at the head, and have immense influence, and the most eminent people would care for one of his smiles . . . for one kind word. It would be enough for him to open his lips for his wishes to be guessed immediately: his looks would mean favour or disgrace . . . he would be both powerful and mighty. . . .

In the meanwhile, Pani Walewska's thoughts were quite different.

After conducting her husband to his apartment, she returned to her boudoir and seated herself in the corner of the couch. She was disturbed at the news that she was going to stay in Warsaw. The solitary life in Walewice, of which she was so much afraid a short time ago, now seemed to her to be a paradise. She was afraid of Warsaw, of the cold drawing-rooms, of the Princess-sister, and Anetka Tyszkiewicz, and Mme. de Vauban, and the whole of that world of intrigues, gossip, paltry cares, and hatreds.

She knew that world but little, but from all contact with it she received disillusion, pain, and wounds! And what for? Was it because she had done her mother's will and married a man old enough to be her grandfather, that she was obliged to give up all her dreams, that her life became a book, the first pages of which were missing?

Out of her youth, full of bright thoughts and radiant faith, she was pushed into satiety. She was ordered, she who was

just rising, to follow a sunset; so she went hiding all her deceptions, and wished to believe that the day begins and ends by a cloudy dusk, that the dusk gives peace of life, and that that quiet was better than her fantastic dreams.

She thought then that her sojourn in Warsaw might assure her more freedom, or at least break the monotony, that it would stop her husband's grumbling. But that agreeable thought disappeared as soon as she remembered Princess Jablonowska, who undoubtedly would not fail to spread over her her protecting wings. Even her husband's ambitious thoughts did not tempt her. What would she do in the Castle, in such brilliant society? She, a poor gentlewoman, at the Emperor's reception! Would she ever know how to move? Should she be questioned by the Emperor, could she give him an answer, not dictated by the court etiquette, but coming from the heart? Never! To-day, there on the road, she had seen him, and she felt proud, satisfied, and happy! She spoke to him as her most sincere enthusiasm dictated. Napoleon returning victorious from the battlefield appeared to her great; he was such as her brother represented him to be; he was that legendary hero, saviour, absolute ruler of Europe, King of Kings! But there in the Castle, surrounded by flatterers, courtiers . . . let the others bow to the ground to him, let them solicit his smile, let them fight for his look. . . .

Her husband is a dreamer; a small politeness he took for a special favour. He will lose his illusions soon . . . although one should be just, and grant that the French people could not be out-distanced by anybody in politeness. Those flowers, for instance. . . . The Grand Marshal of the Court remembering to send some flowers to Pani Walewska! How many similar letters he must have written; how many men he must have sent with flowers; for there is no doubt that he sent out a great many similar bouquets.

Pani Walewska stretched out her arm for the bouquet, and began to play with the lilies of the valley, to touch the roses.

Suddenly a piece of paper rustled amongst the flowers. She took it, and read the following inscription on it: "*Pour la belle Marie!*"

She unfolded the paper, and she found on the other side of

it, written with the same even handwriting: "*On s'est fait répeter votre nom jusqu'à l'apprendre par cœur.*" Pani Walewska shivered, and read it again.

Then there, in the Castle . . . by the means of a bouquet, sent by the Marshal of the Court! . . . But who would dare to do this? Gorayski? Impossible! . . . Perchance that hateful Count Herceau. The handwriting was the same as on the letter written to the Chamberlain—to be sure the same! But in that case . . . why Duroc? He had never seen her in his life! But perhaps it was he who was with the Emperor?

Darkness came before Pani Walewska's eyes, her beautiful face reddened with anger.

Therefore for her goodwill, for her disinterested enthusiasm, perhaps for her gay curiosity, flowing only from the purest source of admiration, they pay her by a love madrigal! . . . Therefore he, that great man, that God of War, that conqueror of whom she dreamed, would be as a commonplace, heedless fellow! Then it was in such a way he explained to himself her exclamation, by which she greeted him kneeling on the step of the carriage?

Pani Walewska laughed at herself; her fancy must have carried her too far! The indecent importunity of that Duroc she dared to attribute to the Emperor! He would take such a mean step! he would send to a married woman! . . . No, a hundred times! Duroc, only Duroc, nobody else. Her husband must know about all that; he must shelter her against similar attacks.

She seized the bouquet, crumpled the paper, and, with proudly lifted head, went to her husband's apartments, but when she touched the handle of the door conducting to the Chamberlain's bedroom the cold of the metal penetrated her through and froze her blood.

But suppose her husband should sneer at her offended pride; suppose the Marshal's name should overawe him; suppose he should apply to her his ideas of a former courtier; suppose that out of spite to her he would not acknowledge that her anger was justified? Pani Walewska retreated from the door and returned to her apartment.

No, she would give a good lesson even to such a man as

Duroc. She would administer justice herself; she would make him understand that he was wrong . . . She would do it better, more simply than the Chamberlain himself. She would send back the bouquet and the letter and pretend that she had never read it.

She did not think long. She rang the bell for her chambermaid and told her to call John, who was devoted to her.

The old servant came in immediately. Pani Walewska put the letter between the flowers and handed the bouquet to the man.

"Will you find your way to the Castle?" she asked.

The man wished to answer, but Pani Walewska did not give him time to gather his thoughts.

"You must! There you will ask for the Marshal of the Court, Duroc; you must see him and give him back those flowers. Should they ask you who sent you, say it is I. I count on you. I know you are devoted to me. Leave the house in such a way that nobody sees you, and no word to any one about your message."

John bowed and stood embarrassed, looking at the bouquet.

"Please, my lady, they are waiting for me, for I have to go to Walewice at once and return as soon as possible."

Pani Walewska came to the man and put her hand on his shoulder. "I thought you loved me a little. . . ."

John's eyes shone. "I am willing, my lady, if——"

There the old servant stopped suddenly, and looked in a strange way on the bouquet.

Pani Walewska guessed the meaning of that look.

"John," she said emphatically, "you have known me since I was a child . . . The question is not about a simple message, but about rendering me a great service. . . . Somebody else ought to do it; I am not going, however, to force you. . . . I can see you are not willing. Leave the flowers, I shall carry them back myself."

"Please, my lady, I am willing, I will go. . . . I do not care if I am late. . . ."

Pani Walewska repeated her instructions, adding that he must not allow himself to be sent away without seeing the Marshal himself; he must hand him the flowers without any explanation whatever.

CHAPTER VI

THE next day, early in the morning, Baptiste rapped at Pani Walewska's door, and informed her that the Chamberlain was already up and waiting for her to go out.

Pani Walewska began to dress hastily, but before she was ready she was told that the Princess-sister wished to see her. Pani Walewska told the chambermaid to ask her to wait a few moments, when Princess Jablonowska rushed into her dressing-room.

"*Ma chère Marie!* excuse my intrusion, but I could not deny myself the pleasure of seeing you, *toujours belle!* I learned by accident, through my footman, that you are going to stay! How glad I am! Let me kiss you!"

"I am very much obliged to you," said Pani Walewska with an effort.

"Do not mention it. I am always your friend. How is Anastazy? Yesterday he was not well. I quieted him as well as I could. You understand . . . at his age. . . . Evidently some one told him about your promenade yesterday. Well, Warsaw is a small town; they gossip about anything. But I congratulate you on yesterday's success. Everybody is talking about you! . . ."

Pani Walewska grew pale.

"Success!" she repeated, with an effort.

"Well, you were lucky to converse with the Emperor, and, it seems, made a great impression on him. I assure you I am telling you the truth. It will be sufficient for you when I tell you that last night Duroc called on Vauban. . . . He tried to find out all about you. Anetka was awfully angry. You were very wise to persuade Anastazy to stay."

"Princess , . . you are mistaken."

"*Chère Marie!* You need not prevaricate with me; I am your sister; you must not. Let me kiss you again. I am your best friend. If you want anything from Anastazy, I will help you to get it with all my heart."

"Thank you."

"Of course, nothing is certain yet. Napoleon is not constant in his sentiments. But we shall see! I am very friendly with Talleyrand; I shall be able to find out from him, and let you know beforehand. Only, my dearest, when you have an opportunity, remember that the Prussians have confiscated our two estates; it is only right that justice should be done to me."

Pani Walewska plucked impatiently at her handkerchief, and said coolly: "I do not understand a word of what you are saying."

The Princess patted her lightly on her hand, and said jokingly: "*Très bien, très bien!* You must act in that way until everything is cleared up. You do not know anything; you have not promised anything. I tell you, Talleyrand knows him through and through; he is peculiar and brutal; one must be careful and dexterous with him. I will tell you another piece of great news even. . . . Eléonore Dennèle de la Plaigne has had a son! A courier from Paris brought this news. In answer, the Emperor sent two aides-de-camp. Who knows what will come of this? . . . Therefore you must be very careful, the more so as Anetka is doing her best . . . And, added to all this, the Princess Lubomirska succeeded in obtaining an audience when he was coming from Pultusk; the Emperor found her charming. . . . Therefore all depends. . . ."

Pani Walewska was sitting in a bent attitude, her lips tightly closed.

The Princess was offended by her silence.

"*Ma chère,* perhaps you are angry that I meddle with your affairs, but I considered it to be my duty; it seemed to me that my experience might be useful to you. Believe me, if it had not been for me, Mme. Grabowska would never have been what she was with our last king. I flatter myself that I know the Court, that I know the people, that I have experience."

"I am much obliged, but I do not need that experience at all."

"But, Marie! Well, I will tell you the whole truth. . . .

Vauban called on me, and I promised for you that you would not forget her. She can help you . . . for do you think that you will be able to penetrate into the Castle should Talleyrand not be willing?"

"I do not propose to go to the Castle at all."

"I do not understand you . . . for . . ."

"I have a husband!" answered Pani Walewska proudly, "who in the meanwhile is your brother. . . . You should remember this."

The Princess made an impatient movement.

"I see that you are too confident in your own ability. You forget that, should I think it necessary, I can persuade Anastazy to return to Walewice."

"That is exactly what I am wishing for."

The Princess was preparing some answer when the Chamberlain appeared in the doorway. He was carefully dressed, painted, powdered, and scented.

"Ah, sister here! We were going to call on you! We needed your advice, your help. . . ."

"It is difficult to believe that. . . ."

"The principal question is about Mary's frocks. You understand that she does not know where to go; therefore, dear sister . . ."

"But what can I do? . . . Joubert is open to everybody. Nothing easier than to go to him and order. But I hear that Marie wishes to return to Walewice, which I think very wise. It is very natural with her tastes, and I do not wonder that she does not wish to appear in Court, for, strictly speaking, it is not a Court but a camp. . . ."

The Chamberlain made a grimace.

"You are mistaken!" he said. "There are times when one is obliged to give up and sacrifice many things. We must stay in Warsaw."

"Ah, yes!" rejoined the Princess, with a strange intonation in her voice.

The Chamberlain shrugged his shoulders and rose on his tiptoes.

"I do not like to have to stay here myself, but I cannot find any excuse. . . . They would be offended, and then they would

say that I allowed certain men to come forward . . . therefore I hope you will not refuse to help Mary."

"If such is your wish I am ready—with pleasure. Joubert has imported lovely things. . . . There is a large choice."

Here the Princess began to describe enthusiastically Pani Walewska's future frocks.

The Chamberlain helped her conscientiously, discussing the harmony of colours and all possible details.

Sometimes he would put on his eyeglass, and look critically at his wife's figure before deciding.

Pani Walewska took no part in the discussion, and behaved as if it were not she about whom they were talking, and not she for whom they were planning all those splendours.

During this deliberation the Grand Marshal Duroc was announced.

The Chamberlain appeared in no haste to meet his guest.

The Princess could not conceal her astonishment.

"Duroc here?"

"Phi! Yesterday M. de Périgord came, to-day Duroc . . . they bother me," said the Chamberlain, and went out.

The Princess turned her small, penetrating eyes upon Pani Walewska.

"*Chérie!*" I admire you. . . . I did not think that you were so clever. My dear, do not contradict me, you are awfully clever. Yesterday, I must tell you frankly, I was afraid for you. Anastazy was in a very bad temper. You understand . . . Men are all alike. . . . When I left him I was not certain whether he would be angry with you or not. . . . I have no words for your cleverness . . . it does you honour. . . ."

"I do not understand the admiration which you are kind enough to bestow upon me."

The Princess laughed and threatened her jokingly with her finger.

"How cunning you are! . . . I should be offended with you for your lack of sincerity, but I prefer to forgive you. Only be careful . . . and who knows . . . I knew Madame Grabowska; nobody thought that she would become so great. . . . I see it irritates you, so I will not say anything more. Only be careful . . be careful. . . ."

Pani Walewska's eyes filled with tears.

The Princess did not notice it. She vowed several times that she had the best intentions towards her sister-in-law; she promised to go at once and order frocks for her; and after most tender demonstrations she went away.

Pani Walewska breathed freely when the Princess had gone. She understood the meaning of her insinuations, and this aroused her pride. They took her to be a flirt; they suspected her of some improper plans at a jump, a supposition not justified at all; they were building a whole structure of mere conjecture.

Pani Walewska recollected her bouquet, Duroc's visit, and she became frightened of the people, of the Princess's mysterious smiles, of Anetka Potocka's ironical laughter with which she had greeted her at that never-to-be-forgotten ball.

A sense of darkness surrounded her; some mysterious consciousness of peril aroused in her a sad presentiment.

Several times she tried to persuade herself that her fears were groundless, merely arising out of insignificant facts which only she would have dreamed of connecting; that she exaggerated her own importance. But all these arguments, by means of which Pani Walewska tried to quiet herself, did not convince her. An inward voice told her that she must tell her husband of everything that frightened her.

She did not know what and how she should tell him, but nevertheless such a confession seemed to her necessary. At the moment of coming to that conclusion her husband's voice interrupted her thoughts.

The Chamberlain for the second time repeated: "Pray, come for a minute! . . . Duroc begged me earnestly to honour him with an introduction to you."

"Duroc?"

"You are absent-minded . . . the Grand Marshal of the Court . . . do not linger; you must not keep him waiting too long. He is very . . I never expected that he would have such good manners. A very polite fellow. . . . We must appreciate his politeness."

"Another time. . . I am not dressed to receive callers."

The Chamberlain smiled contemptuously.

"You must not be too particular; a little *négligé* is fashion-

able. Then he must know that Madame Colonna Walewska does not consider that such a visitor does her any particular honour. . . . Come!"

"I have a headache. . . . I took cold!" said the Chamberlain's wife, defending herself.

He began to get angry.

"Silly fancies! Headache! You must master yourself, or you will not be able to make one step at Court. Good manners should dominate everything. I remember well once in the Lazienki Palace I had a terrific toothache, and the King began to tell some amusing stories; everybody laughed, therefore I was obliged to laugh also, although I had tears in my eyes from pain. Well, come along; he has already waited too long."

The Chamberlain took her by the arm and conducted her to the drawing-room.

Pani Walewska was prepared with a proud answer, such as would quench every smile and stop every word of refined insinuation, and she followed, listening to the throbbing of her heart as she walked.

"Duroc, Prince of Friul, Grand Marshal of the Court of His Imperial Majesty!" resounded suddenly in Pani Walewska's ears.

She raised her eyes hesitatingly, and was thunderstruck with surprise, for bowing in front of her stood the same general who, at Jablonna, helped her in such a ready way to her never-to-be-forgotten conversation with the Emperor.

Duroc bowed elegantly to Pani Walewska, and greeted her with a graceful compliment.

Pani Walewska nodded slightly, and, with a sense of fright, looked round her as if to find a place in which she might hide.

The Grand Marshal, not receiving any answer, made a further remark.

But Pani Walewska was able to make no reply this time either.

The Chamberlain could hardly conceal the irritation aroused by his wife's country manners, and trying to break the embarrassing silence, said himself: "You must be indulgent . . . my wife is not well."

"I am so sorry I dared to trouble you, Madame, with my ardent wish to pay my respects to you."

"Take a seat," said Pani Walewska, making an effort.

Duroc sat opposite to her, while the Chamberlain stood behind his wife's chair, and rapped upon his snuff-box.

"I should not have dared to importune you, Madame, if it were not to perform the agreeable duty of begging you to grace the presentation ball with your presence."

"I do not know . . ."

"Naturally!" said the Chamberlain with animation, not permitting his wife to finish; "we will try not to disappoint."

"His Majesty the Emperor, when I was fortunate enough to submit the list of those who are to be invited, told me twice to make sure of your presence."

The Chamberlain cleared his throat, and having touched the star of his Order, said politely: "We are very much obliged that he should do us the honour of remembering us."

"After so many months of war," said Duroc graciously, "we are longing not only for such agreeable society as yours, but also for a serious conversation. Life gives us very few pleasant moments. It is true that there are times when, during the uproar of war, somewhere in a forlorn halting-place there passes before us some charming vision, some good-hearted enchantress who brings us momentary intoxication. . . . But such apparitions disappear quickly; then it is no wonder that in a spare moment we revert to them, we follow them with all our thoughts, we long for them with all our souls. . . ."

At this unexpected turn of the conversation the Chamberlain cleared his throat, nodded gravely like a statesman, although he was not certain if the Grand Marshal was not making an allusion to the alliance with Turkey.

As for Pani Walewska, she bent still more forward, avoiding the Marshal's looks.

In the meanwhile, Duroc passed to the last military and political events, and, like an accomplished courtier, glided over the surface of known affairs. He did not betray any secret; he did not throw any new light; and, talking much, he did not commit himself in anything.

Only when he passed to the last victory at Pultusk and mentioned the return to Warsaw, he suddenly changed his tone, and said with sincere enthusiasm: "Yesterday was one of

the most beautiful days in His Majesty's life. . . . Heaven and earth made an effort to show him the winter's charm in all its splendour. I do not remember the Emperor so happy! The reception at Jablonna left in his heart indelible traces."

"I did not know anything about it," said the Chamberlain.

"You must not take my words too literally. If there had been triumphal arches, garlands, fireworks, it would not have made any impression. . . . The man under whose feet flowers have been thrown so many times, for whom they burn torches, requires something else than commonplace homage; for such a one the most splendid receptions are nothing. . . . It was quite different in Jablonna! There it was merely a spontaneous movement of a heart; there he was welcomed by a look full of confidence, enthusiasm, and faith. . . . And one such look suffices for millions."

"Certainly, certainly," approved the Chamberlain with dignity.

Pani Walewska trembled from emotion.

Duroc suddenly changed the subject of conversation, and, having turned to Pani Walewska, asked suddenly: "Do you like flowers?"

Pani Walewska shivered, but, feeling that the Marshal was looking at her inquisitively, answered with an effort: "Yes, but not in a bouquet."

"By this question I wish to beg your forgiveness for my daring deed of yesterday. Ignorant of Polish customs, I am afraid I have done something improper. But I think that the flowers are only a homage."

"The flowers alone. . . . Yes."

"In our country it is sometimes allowed to make them speak."

"In our country not everybody has the right to listen to them."

"But one can accept them always. Do you like lilies of the valley? I am not very fond of them, but for the Emperor there are no more beautiful flowers . . . uniting delicacy with strong perfume; they personify simplicity; they soothe by their aroma. . . ."

"And they try to intoxicate. . . ."

"You consider that an offence? . . . Is our life, or rather certain moments of life, not an intoxication?"

"Not for everyone."

"But the lily of the valley contains so much sincerity. Is it proper to push it away? Its perfume brings all its existence, with its exhalation it sacrifices a part of its life."

"If the lily of the valley symbolises so many noble sentiments, it cannot be at the same time the sign of playing—there where flows its perfume, there must follow respect . . . there is no room for licence. . . ."

"Such is also my opinion," concluded Duroc, and rose.

The Grand Marshal repeated the invitation, said something about the presentation at the Castle, and after a few compliments, agreeably tickling the Chamberlain's vanity, he went away.

The Chamberlain was very pleased, so much so, that he did not notice his wife's confusion, and esteemed it proper to share his thoughts with her.

"Do you see . . . yesterday you doubted . . . to-day you have a proof . . . they cringe, they try to win us to them. . . . Very well then. . . . I have no objection, only they must not think that I shall accept all their conditions. No, I shall not be a fool. I shall not be satisfied with a paltry office. Duroc is quite a polished man. . . . Nobody could guess that he is of such low extraction. Your conversation about the lily of the valley was very clever . . . very clever indeed."

Pani Walewska looked at her husband hesitatingly. "Then you know?"

"Certainly! I had enough time to understand those half words . . . . Through you they would like to approach me. In the beginning you seemed to be embarrassed, but afterwards it was capital! The Frenchman did not know what to answer! That is the best way with them. . . ."

Pani Walewska breathed freely.

"Therefore I think the best for us would be to return to Walewice."

The Chamberlain, who had just then risen on tiptoe, hearing that, shuddered so that he nearly fell.

"What? . . . what? Return to Walewice! You are joking!"

"Of course not, as, in face of such a situation, it is out of the question that I should go to the reception. The Princess-sister . . ."

"Why out of the question? The Princess . . . she told you idle stories, that is all. All are jealous. . . . You must do as I ask you to do. . . ."

"You cannot complain . . . but if you wish to remain, permit me . . ."

"I shall not! New fancies. . . . Yes, I know, you wish to contradict me. When I wished to stay in Walewice, you wished to come to Warsaw; only yesterday you did not like my idea of going back. To-day you dislike town, and all that you do to thwart me, to act according to your own will. . . ."

"You are unjust! I cannot interpret their kindness differently from its meaning. I wish to return; I defend not only myself but your name also."

The Chamberlain looked at his wife inquisitively, for he did not understand at the first moment the meaning of her words; only after a while of thinking his face brightened up. He burst out with hearty laughter.

"Then you imagine that they cringe to you. . . . Ha! ha! ha! You are all the same. You lack penetration, a broader way of looking at things. All of you see the mirror and yourself in it. . . . Ha! ha! ha! Only now I understand. You are all alike, for the Princess, too, drew different conclusions in regard to herself from M. de Périgord's friendliness towards her. . . . And you are already frightened about yourself. I admire your modesty, but Duroc is not like Gorayski. I do not deny that you can be queen of every ball, but you must not be afraid of homage, for you are at the side of Colonna Walewski! What an amusing joke!"

The Chamberlain's assurance passed to Pani Walewska. To be sure, from his point of view, all facts looked differently.

It was possible that the unexpected conversation at the door of the carriage was due to the name of "Walewska"; perchance that meeting furnished opportunity to gain the husband through the wife.

Pani Walewska looked at her husband and again doubted. For what purpose would they need such a man, who, notwithstanding his boasting, was simply a rich nobleman, but had not great influence, was not popular, and had no capacity whatever . . . and who, by the utmost efforts of will, defended himself

from impotency. Should she not be able to appreciate her husband at his worth? And perhaps they are mistaken, perhaps they were overawed by his riches and the name of Walewski?

But then, what was the meaning of Duroc's strange allusions?

Pani Walewska once more repeated her desire to go to Walewice, and was ready to tell her husband about her secret; but being rebuked by his boasting, ridiculed at every point, accused of ignorance of a great political game, became silent, for she understood that from that quarter she could expect neither advice nor protection.

The few following days seemed to prove that the Chamberlain was right.

He paid visits to M. de Périgord and Marshal Duroc; he was present at the audience with the Emperor; he received Murat's and Prince Borghese's invitations; he was invited to two military reviews held at Saski Square, and, according to his ideas, was convinced that he would have a splendid career, although he himself did not understand what it would be.

In the meanwhile, Pani Walewska was the prey of Joubert's art and the Princess-sister's invention. In vain she wished to be satisfied with one frock. The Princess insisted upon having five of them, the Chamberlain added a sixth, giving as a pretext the presence of a Persian ambassador, who was expected every day.

It was more difficult, however, to choose from the six frocks the one in which Pani Walewska was to go to the Castle. The task was a difficult one, much more so that the Princess had exact information about splendid dresses prepared by the two Countesses Potocki; by Mmes. Sobolewska and Gutakowska, and by the Countesses Lubienska and Krasinska. The Chamberlain favoured a green frock with silver embroideries; the Princess preferred pale blue with gold stars. The Princess's opinion prevailed for this reason, that it seemed Pani Wojczynska was going to have a green frock with silver designs on it.

Amidst all these preparations Pani Walewska spent a few relatively quiet days.

The Princess smiled to her significantly, but never mentioned the meeting in Jablonna, nor made any of her suppositions.

Then Pani Walewska cleverly pretended not to be well, and thus she had a good excuse for not making calls.

The Chamberlain was irritated at this; accused his wife of fancies; but being very much preoccupied with his expectations, had no time to show his energy, for either he was dressing and curing himself in order to be strong enough to support the fatigue of the *réunions,* or went from one to another of the "at homes."

And the *réunions,* calls, balls, teas were increasing from day to day. The road leading to Warsaw was still crowded with carriages bringing whole families from the most remote corners of the country, for all the noblemen were anxious to look at Napoleon's splendour, or perhaps they were anxious to find a new field for their activity, to which all the roads were closed during the Prussian government.

Therefore in Warsaw people were meeting every day who had not seen each other for a long time, having been separated by the same fear, by the same egotism.

The Chamberlain met a great many people. There was not a day in which he would not recognise in a decrepit old man, in some withered lady, in a sour old maid, in an old bachelor spoilt by life, a boon companion, a famous madcap, a conqueror of ladies, a famous beauty, a sweet girl . . . and they all came to Warsaw to be warmed in Napoleon's blazing sun.

The Chamberlain was sometimes surprised, for, as under the touch of an enchanted wand, there came forth the ghosts of the past, talking about their orders, titles, and privileges as if the Polish king, and not Napoleon, were still in the Castle.

The Chamberlain was astonished still more, for he found all those whom he met were extremely old, while he was looking so remarkably well, the proof of which he had when he was looking in a mirror. The Chamberlain understood then how much he was obliged for this to Baptiste, and he showed him his gratitude by frequent presents. But when at the Princess's "at home" a certain nobleman in a well-turned compliment expressed his admiration for the men of the old school, who, by moderation, had preserved their strength, and therefore were able to reach old age, the Chamberlain at last believed in the moderation of his past life, and began to set himself as an

example to the young people. In that way the Chamberlain slowly gained some consideration, for fortunately for him he did not meet with those who knew his *curriculum vitæ*.

Bolesha alone, listening sometimes to the Chamberlain's boasting, laughed ironically, thus raising some doubts.

The Chamberlain, however, every day grew more and more assured of his deserts, and as he found that such an assurance was becoming to him, and that the people respected him more than they did before, he determined to adopt this method for the future.

And the Chamberlain could say to himself, that if at the Princess's reception, on New Year's Eve, they paid but very little attention to him, now they were all endeavouring to make him forget that slight.

M. de Talleyrand, when he met the Chamberlain, very often asked his advice. Duroc was exquisitely polite to him; even the proud Murat conversed with him several times. The deference shown to the Chamberlain by the French dignitaries had an immediate effect—Warsaw society transferred its regards to his son and his grandsons.

The Chamberlain became so sure of himself now, that when at the Princess Dominik Radziwil's they discussed eagerly who would finally be invited to the Emperor's drawing-rooms, the Chamberlain said, with a contemptuous smile, that Duroc had come three times with an invitation, that the Emperor himself asked about him, but that he, the Chamberlain, could not promise to go, for he was afraid that the society would be too mixed.

This made a great impression; all were astonished at the Chamberlain's daring, and they seemed to be still more assured of his importance.

In the meantime the day of the first ball came.

The Chamberlain, having remained in bed much longer than usual in order to gather his strength, went to his wife's apartment towards noon. But here he learned to his great fright that Pani Walewska was more ill than ever.

The Chamberlain went straight to her bedroom. Pani Walewska was lying on the sofa, covered carefully.

"What is the matter with you?"

"I have a worse cold than ever."

"I will send for a physician . . he must cure you . . . we have not much time."

"I do not understand you."

"Have you forgotten that to-day is the ball at the Castle?" burst out the Chamberlain.

"Then what? I am not going—you see for yourself."

"But this is only your fancy . . . a cold! The physician will cure you. Court ball! If we could only show ourselves there for a few minutes! Otherwise they will say that we were not invited. Take example from me! I remember once at a dinner with our late king I had a toothache, when the king began to tell some of his stories; all laughed, therefore I was obliged to laugh also—although I was near crying. And the king looked at me graciously, and said: 'Walewski, do you enjoy my story?' Do you understand?"

"Yes, you have told me several times already."

The Chamberlain was offended.

"Then I repeat it again. I am sending for a physician. He must cure you, and you must make an effort."

Pani Walewska shook her head. "No, no; I cannot."

The Chamberlain put his eyeglass to his eye, looked for a while at his wife's lovely face, and said with conviction: "I find you beautiful! You are looking very interesting indeed. The physician will strengthen you, and we will go."

Pani Walewska made a negative movement; the Chamberlain continued: "Do this for me, otherwise they will slander us; then Duroc has invited us so many times. This is not a question of an ordinary ball; affairs of great importance might be discussed."

"But why am I needed there?"

"What a question! Can you not understand that a wife is the right hand in Court life. Every statesman must have a wife able to be his *alter ego*, his ally."

Pani Walewska seemed not to share her husband's opinion. The Chamberlain became irritated.

He ordered a footman to go at once and bring the most famous physician, by name Dederka, who came soon, had a long consultation with Pani Walewska, then came embarrassed to the Chamberlain and shook his head helplessly.

"What, then?" inquired the Chamberlain, alarmed.

"Bad," decided the physician.

"But what . . ."

"Bad, my dear sir; a woman, willingly giving up a ball, despising an opportunity to show her frock, a woman who does not care to be coquettish, and who prefers a rest instead of society . . . it is bad."

"But it seems you do not understand. . . . Precisely the question is to strengthen her for a couple of hours, that she may be presented . . . then she can return."

"H'm! H'm! It is impossible. I am afraid it is melancholia, and in that case I cannot even bleed her, for the cause of melancholy might be either too much or too little blood. Suppose it is too little?"

"Then what?"

"Nothing; she must take some cooling drink, some salts, and we must wait until the illness becomes more accentuated; then we shall jump at it, we shall attack it from every point, and we will cure the lady."

"But I wanted . . ."

"I know," interrupted the physician slowly. "Science does not permit me to act otherwise. A woman despising society, such a case is helpless; one can expect anything bad."

"You do not know my wife."

"Impressionable, delicate. . . ."

"You are singing quite a different song."

"Yes, but our aim is the same . . . impossible, she must stay at home. . . ."

That positive decision shook the Chamberlain's determination. He went once more to his wife, explained the whole situation to her, spoke much about the duties of people occupying exalted positions; finally, having met with unshakable opposition, determined to save the situation by himself, and began to dress.

Pani Walewska breathed freely. At last she was doing as she wished; she had conquered all obstacles and avoided the Court.

But when a few hours later the chambermaid told her that the Chamberlain had gone to the Castle, she began to doubt whether she was right, whether she did not take too seriously

all those civilities, whether for an imaginery peril she had not deprived herself of the opportunity of seeing a great conqueror in the majesty of his power, whether her behaviour did not look like cowardice. She ought to have found in herself enough strength to face the danger; it depended on her behaviour, on her answer, to turn away the desire of familiarity, should such a desire be manifested.

Pani Walewska's lively imagination spun out further and further the thread of her thoughts. Of what was she afraid? Should she not meet even him boldly and tell him, should it come to this: "Sire, all your Majesty was kind enough to tell me, I receive as the words of a hero, who is fond of joking, when it pleases him."

It would have been much better than this fright, it would put a stop to all the Princess's insinuations. Acting as she did, she put herself in a difficult position . . . who knows if she had not become ridiculous.

Perhaps all these civilities were only an innocent foolishness. Had she not known many Frenchmen before? How many of them had told her about their love for her, but having been rebuked, had repeated the same words of love during the same evening to some other woman! Even that Count Herceau, he was hardly introduced to her, and immediately he attempted to say, like Cæsar, *Vici!*

Pani Walewska was not satisfied with herself—the quiet surroundings irritated her. She took some French novel and turned over its pages, following in her mind the same thought. Sometimes she thought of pale, thoughtful Gorayski; and then she came to a strange conviction, that in case of need he would defend her.

Pani Walewska's solitude was interrupted by a lackey. She looked at him surprised.

"M. de Corvisart, personal physician of his Majesty the Emperor of the French," he announced.

Pani Walewska could not believe her own ears.

"M. de Corvisart? What did you say to him?"

"That her ladyship is ill! But he begged to be received; he says that my lord knows about his visit."

Pani Walewska did not know how to answer, only after a few

moments of reflection came to the conclusion that M. de Corvisart's visit must be attributed to her husband's solicitude, and she determined to receive such a late visitor.

The Emperor's physician, introduced by Baptiste to the adjoining boudoir, saluted Pani Walewska respectfully.

"Madame, pray excuse me! I would not dare to trouble you if not for the duty of my vocation."

Pani Walewska glanced hesitatingly at M. de Corvisart's richly embroidered Court dress, and said, embarrassed: "I do not know to what to attribute your kindness. If I am not mistaken you come from the Castle?"

"Yes, from the Emperor's ball."

"You should not deprive yourself of the pleasure."

"But you are suffering?"

"Ah, yes, but it is a suffering—pray excuse my frankness—for which time is the best physician."

"It is our duty to make that time as short as possible."

"I am very glad to have an opportunity to make your acquaintance, for I have heard much of your cleverness."

M. de Corvisart bowed, and looking attentively at Pani Walewska, asked abruptly—

"Can I know what is your suffering?"

"But . . ."

"I am a physician, consequently like a confessor . . . one must be perfectly frank with me. Have you any fever? In such a climate . . ."

"But you see of yourself that I do not give in, I do not complain. . . . I have a headache, general feebleness . . . which is not so alarming as to allow me to call myself ill, but it is sufficient to force me to give up such a brilliant ball! Then I think my husband exaggerated a little, and troubled you unnecessarily."

"You are mistaken. I heard him talking about your illness with the Emperor, and I came here in my character of physician of the Court of his Majesty. I was ordered to take care of you, and to report immediately. May I add that, although it seemed to me very unpleasant to be sent from the ball, I am now grateful for much more. I never had such a beautiful patient."

Under the influence of M. de Corvisart's words Pani Walewska blushed, her lips trembled.

Corvisart came nearer to her, and said in a subdued voice—

"You must be frank with me! Pray be frank! I am ready to use all my knowledge, and not to allow even one shiver of pain to appear on your face."

Pani Walewska looked at the Court physician and said with determination—

"You ask me to be frank with you. Well, I am not ill."

Corvisart looked at her astonished.

"You mean that you are better just now."

"No, I am not ill at all. I could not come to the ball for reasons . . . which I could not declare. I appeal to your professional honour—I told the truth to the physician."

Pani Walewska became silent and dropped her eyes; on her long silky eyelashes glistened a tear.

Corvisart said quietly: "You confirmed my supposition, although your husband spoke so much about your illness."

"I led him into the error."

"Now I do not understand what to think. Then it was not the Chamberlain who was the cause of your pretending . . . ?"

Pani Walewska rose from her sofa and said: "Notwithstanding all the respect I have for you, I shall not answer any more of your questions."

Corvisart rose with marked displeasure, and said drily: "I am sorry! I thought I was on the way to discover the real suffering, which has nothing in common with the body."

"So much the better, then, if it remains undiscovered."

"I doubt it! I have no claim upon your confidence, and I know how to be grateful for that which you were kind enough to show me. I, in my capacity of Court physician of his Majesty, shall have the honour to state that you feel weak, and have also a slight cold and require absolute rest. In the meanwhile, I will not forget the gratitude which you expressed for the Emperor's care and solicitude. . . . Am I mistaken?"

Pani Walewska put out her hand to the physician.

"I thank you heartily."

"Corvisart is not hard-hearted at all. The second auscultation, if it is required, will come easier."

"I would like to show you my gratitude."

Corvisart shook his head.

"You can do it only by showing your confidence in me. You must not be surprised at my sincerity. I came here without any malicious thought—I go out with admiration. I know the Court, I know the people. Every day I see the wounds that do not bleed. They told me so much about you. I did not believe them; to-day I am convinced. The most agreeable moment I shall cherish of to-day's ball will be the conversation with you."

Corvisart bowed, and was going.

"One word more!" said Pani unexpectedly.

"I am at your command."

"If you will avoid mentioning my gratitude for this care and solicitude I shall be much obliged to you."

"I understand! It will be difficult. . . . Those words must be added even when they are conspicuous by their absence. But I shall do my best either to drop them or to reduce them to the most commonplace phrase."

When Corvisart left Pani Walewska became more hopeful. This unexpected ally made her more courageous, notwithstanding that his visit confirmed all her fears.

The Chamberlain came home long after midnight; he took off his evening dress, put on a warm, comfortable dressing-gown, and having learned from the valet that his wife was not yet asleep, went to her.

At sight of him she tried to look tired on account of lack of sleep, but the Chamberlain had not the slightest intention of bothering himself to inquire about her health. He seemed to be entirely preoccupied with himself; he wished to talk of himself, to find some one who would confirm his thoughts.

"Regret, regret that you did not go. You could have seen by yourself, you would have been convinced. . . . Malachowski gnashed his teeth, and Wybicki hovered round me and cringed. The time came! . . . They are paid . . . but it is only the beginning! I shall make them remember me! They thought that I was a simple Chamberlain, that my ambition was satisfied with that charge and the title! They pricked me continually! We shall see. . . ."

"But how was it?"

"Magnificent! Crowded! The Emperor said to different people just what Poniatowski whispered to him. Only when he noticed me he made a sign to Poniatowski to be silent. I bow to him. He looks at my hands and says: 'Chamberlain, have you your snuff-box?' 'Yes, Sire,' I answer, and extend my arm to him. The Emperor took a pinch of snuff, and looking at my snuff-box, said: 'Very beautiful!' 'It is a present from His Majesty the late King,' I answered. 'So, permit me, then, to present you with a snuff-box also.' I wanted to thank him, but the Emperor made a sign to Duroc and began to question me. I could hardly answer all his questions. How many sons and grandsons had I, where have I been residing during the Prussian invasion, whether they did not harm me. . . . Well, speaking shortly, he has vast plans. He remarked that we are at the threshold of a new, broad life; that now it is time, after years of inactivity, to seize the rudder with a strong hand. He spoke a long time. I cannot repeat everything, for you might easily betray the State secrets. I was even afraid that some one might be listening; Gutakowski kept round us and tried to catch our conversation, but as soon as he drew nearer the Emperor lowered his voice. At last he asked me: 'And where is your wife?' I told him that you were ill, and he at once called M. de Corvisart, and said: 'Visit Mme. Colonna Walewska and report how her health is.' Naturally I thanked him, and he smiled and . . . slapped me on the shoulder. Do you understand? . . . Astonishment in the room. . . . Yes, he slapped me . . . here . . . here! . . ."

The Chamberlain rose on his tiptoes, rapped his snuff-box, looked sourly at his wife, who was listening indifferently, and added—

"Yesterday I talked with M. de Périgord. H'm! . . . We must build solid foundations for the new Government. There must be discipline in the army, discipline among the officials, discipline everywhere. Look, what happened in France! They cut off Louis' head, they murdered the nobility, there were revolutions, conventions, directorates, till Bonaparte put his hand on everything, and all is well. He rules, and there is order; everything prospers. It will be the same here. No indulgence! The late King sighed and complained enough of different

reformers. I remember well, he said once to me: 'Let them give me one acre of land for my kingdom, and let them take the rest!' He was the best of men: witty, intelligent, a good story-teller—and the Thursday dinners in the Lazienki! Discipline must be everywhere, and it will be!"

The Chamberlain suddenly moaned and seized one of his knees, and, the pain having passed, he looked askance at his wife, and said—

"And what do you say?"

"I? I do not know what you are talking about."

The Chamberlain tightened his lips and smiled ironically.

"It is my fault! I have forgotten that you were born for a different kind of life—*le grand monde* will not root out that which country life planted in you."

"But allow . . . your talk was so entangled."

"And it will be still more! I advise you to try to come up to my standard. I am now glad you did not go to the ball; you would have said some nonsense, and Dombrowski's partisans are only waiting to catch something. . . ."

"Your way of conversation is a very particular one."

"Yes, certainly, and incomprehensible. I know it. I know it. Enough! Mme. de Vauban told me she will call on you to-morrow. You will receive her with dignity, but without haste. They deserve that we should be a little stiff with them. They try to make an alliance with me. Very well. I shall concentrate my means, conquer the common foe, and then I shall settle my account. In the first place, away with Dombrowski's partisans. Wybicki shall not delight himself for long. . . ."

"Would the Emperor part with him?"

"The Emperor! . . . I wish for it."

Pani Walewska looked at her husband, doubting whether his mind was sound. The Chamberlain, carried away by his own words, closed his eyes and seemed to listen to the echo of his voice, that resounded in the cut-glass standing on the toilet-table.

"The day after to-morrow we shall be at Talleyrand's 'at home'—and in a week we shall give a ball."

"We . . . a ball!"

"Yes; I said a ball. A representative ball. The Princess will take care of it!"

Pani Walewska, surprised by such an unexpected resolution, wished to ask about details, but the Chamberlain, kissing his hand to her noisily, smiled indulgently and trotted off to his apartments.

CHAPTER VII

THE Brühl Palace shone with streams of light, throwing a blinding glare on the darkness of Saski Square. For an hour there passed by its portico endless rows of carriages, coaches, and sledges, depositing on carpeted stairs people wrapped up in furs, overcoats, shawls, and military mantles. Sometimes from under a wrapper appeared for a moment the hem of a shining rich dress; sometimes from under an open overcoat shone the star of an Order, arousing admiration among the gathered crowd. Sometimes by the livery of coachmen and footmen, by the horses, by the coat-of-arms on the coach, the crowd would recognise the guests, and then the name would pass from mouth to mouth, sometimes pronounced with respect, sometimes with a sneering whisper, sometimes with ironical laughter, or with an indifferent curve of the mouth.

The coming guests were more and more numerous, more and more noisy; the footmen hastened more and more to open the doors of the carriages; the Palace door opened more and more widely.

In the cloak-room downstairs the animation was increasing. There, from under large mantles, were emerging rustling, shining frocks, silver and gold embroidered uniforms, and evening dresses varied in colour.

From this cloak-room, after the last inspection of their dresses in the mirrors of the vestibules, the guests mounted by stairs covered with scarlet cloth, at the top of which stood, smiling, distributing hearty greetings, the host of the Palace, M. Talleyrand de Périgord, Prince of Benevento.

Talleyrand, by means of this ball, succeeded in cutting the Gordian knot—he set aside Poniatowski's hesitation and Duroc's embarrassment.

The Emperor's wish was to make himself known to the wider circles of Warsovian society, to give to his sojourn on the shores of the Vistula a solemn character, and to astonish the neighbours by his majestic splendour. After several receptions in the Castle, which had the character of audiences, it was decided that a ball should be given, but unexpected difficulties arose.

Napoleon was living in the Castle, but Prince Joseph Poniatowski lived near the Castle, in the palace called Blacha, and therefore was considered almost as the host of the old residence of Polish kings. Therefore the Emperor could not very well assume the rôle of host, the more so that the Castle, according to the diplomatic decision of the Cabinet, would give to the ball a too important meaning. On his part, Prince Joseph Poniatowski could not send out invitations to a ball at the place where the actual ruler was living. To add to that, it was difficult to find a neutral palace, for although Warsaw possessed a great number of aristocratic residences, in which even crowned heads were formerly received, when the French army entered Poland those residences were occupied by generals, marshals, and superior officials of the Imperial Court; and as the influx of noblemen was enormous, the existing hotels could not give accommodation to everybody; consequently those who could tried to get at least a small room in the residences of their friends and acquaintances. Therefore there was no place where a great ball could be given.

The difficulty was settled by Talleyrand, who, with M. Davoust, occupied the Brühl Palace, and who took on himself the rôle of host; and as he was the Emperor's prime minister, the ball given by him had for some people the importance of an official reception; while it could be considered by others as a simple social function, honoured by the Emperor's presence. The society of Warsaw, then, did not think about the double meaning of the ball, and it crowded the Brühl Palace for the sake of not losing an opportunity of seeing Napoleon.

Everybody who could reach, even through a tenth person, Prince Joseph Poniatowksi, or some member of the temporary Government, or a person who was in some contact with the general staff, tried to obtain an invitation for that ball, emphasising his social position and importance in order not to be forgotten.

Talleyrand was very liberal—a ball given by the minister did not require such a choice selection as a Court ball; therefore as many invitations were sent as the size of the Palace would allow.

Crowds of people were coming.

Talleyrand, in red evening dress with gold embroideries, holding his *lorgnon* in one hand and a perfumed handkerchief in the other, bowed, smiled, answered patronisingly all greetings, which sometimes he could not understand, for they were uttered in Polish, and almost every moment turned to a group of young noblemen whom Prince Joseph Poniatowski had placed in waiting to give him information and recall names to his mind.

The Prince of Benevento was indefatigable. For an hour he had bowed and welcomed the guests. But now higher personages were arriving, and titles and historical names were announced at every second. At last even that was over.

Already in the drawing-rooms were assembled the Princes Borghese and Poniatowski, Murat, Davoust, Malachowski, Maret, and all the families of the Potockis, Radziwils, Gutakowskis, Wojczynskis, Sobolewskis, Lubienskis, Moszynskis, Krasinskis, Tyszkiewiczs, and Ossolinskis.

The crowd of officers of the guard who stood at the entrance of the ballroom to admire the Polish ladies, so famed for their beauty, now began to grow thinner.

M. de Talleyrand looked with increasing uneasiness at the entrance door, which now was very seldom opened. One of the young men standing beside him dared to address him.

"It seems all the *invités* have now arrived. Will it not be proper to send a courier to the Castle?"

Talleyrand answered: "Not yet; we must wait."

The nobleman withdrew and began to whisper with his comrades, while M. de Périgord leaned on a side rail and became thoughtful, gazing unconsciously on the dark frescos of the portico, on worn-away coats-of-arms and monograms, even on the burning chandeliers, and inattentively caught the servants' gossip.

M. de Périgord's thoughts were interrupted by the Duke of Bassano.

"Is the Emperor notified?"

Talleyrand shrugged his shoulders.

"But you must know that she has not yet arrived."

"And suppose she does not come at all?"

"I have not yet a decisive answer; one of the ladies went to her."

"But it is ridiculous that we all should wait for a goose."

M. de Périgord smiled ironically.

"I cannot help that; the Emperor commanded to let him know only when she arrived, and should she choose to come early he was to be informed at once."

"Childishness! In that way she will be spoiled. I am surprised that Duroc did not persuade him. It will attract attention. The Emperor will be hurt. Hardly is all over with Eléonore——"

Talleyrand shook his fingers impatiently.

"You do not need to remind me of all that," he said impetuously, suddenly losing his phlegm. "Such affairs should be treated through lackeys, and not made a show of, much less should others be forced to take a part in them."

The Duke of Bassano looked strangely at M. de Périgord, who hastened to smooth down this outburst.

"I care only about public opinion in Warsaw."

The *diplomats* looked at one another suspiciously and became silent.

There was an embarrassing silence between them. They hated each other, could not endure each other. Notwithstanding that, they were obliged to communicate with each other, and work together for hours and hours.

M. de Périgord, a former lordling, a nobleman, even a bishop, striving after power, was able to put on the republican mask, hating his power-giver and master more every day, but was not able to bear the sight of new potentates growing up round him. The other, until recently simple M. Maret, was now a duke, giving soul and body to Napoleon, not possessing even a shadow of Talleyrand's two-sidedness, following honest ways even in diplomacy, putting personal merit above family traditions. He could not bear those career-hunting noblemen, who were not content in their proud attachment to the Bourbons, but who

put on a Court dress in order to be present at the Emperor's ball. It was the Duke of Bassano who whispered to Napoleon his opinion about a certain portion of the French nobility: "I wished to make them generals and marshals, but they preferred to be my lackeys."

Bassano numbered among such M. de Périgord, only he considered him to be more dangerous, and he could not bear his trifling remarks about the Emperor. Hence frequent quarrels, heard sometimes at the Emperor's door, continual fierce fights, competition and hatred increasing every day.

After some time, the Duke of Bassano, thinking that it would be better to say something, if only not to give the Polish noblemen, who were helping Talleyrand at the ball, an opportunity for gossip, said carelessly: "Is it Prince Poniatowski who will accompany the Emperor while going round?"

"I do not know. Duroc will tell you."

"Certainly. But it would be proper to put forward Wybicki here. The company is too heterogeneous—the Prince is not popular with everybody."

"I do not know. What do you see in that Wybicki? I know that you are friends, but such a thing should not be taken into consideration if there is any question about the public good."

"You forget about the Emperor's liking for Wybicki!"

"His Majesty is sometimes too good. Sometimes he gives preference to people, following the first impulse of his heart, which is not always justified."

"You must be talking from your own experience. I cannot contradict here."

Talleyrand understood the sting.

"Nor I, looking at you."

Bassano reddened, and was going to answer Talleyrand; but the latter, having noticed a lady in the entrance door, bowed to the Duke and went to meet her.

"What news do you bring?" asked he.

The lady leaned towards him, half closed her eyes, and said earnestly: "She is coming."

"At last! I do not know what to do about all this, Princess, you understand."

"And what I have undergone! My brother was obliged to use all his authority."

Talleyrand smiled ironically. The Princess threatened him with her fan.

"You must not be malicious. I deserve gratitude!"

Talleyrand took the Princess's hand and kissed it.

"Not that, not that! If I were ten years younger, it would suffice."

"So much the worse for me."

"Now I understand why they call you a Sultan."

"Do you believe?"

"I believe, for I feel how you set a snare at once!" Here the Princess sighed so deeply that the powder fell from her face; then she added in a low voice: "Only launch her, launch her by all means."

"But——"

"Do not excuse yourself. Speak about her."

Talleyrand laughed heartily.

"Then you think she can be another Pompadour? How little you know the Emperor!"

"Yes, but . . ."

Talleyrand whispered: "You are looking for subtlety of sentiment, for depth, for ideals! Do you know whom he loves? Himself, and then . . . Have you seen at the *porte cochère* those two guards?—he loves them also, but only when at his will they die on the battlefield."

"How horrid!"

"But unfortunately true."

"One would, however, expect something."

"Certainly."

"Therefore do not refuse to help her."

"H'm—it depends. If she knows how to be clever, although I must tell you that this is impossible in the wider meaning. One cannot explain everything. He has fancies; he hates resistance. Then he does not care to preserve appearances."

M. de Périgord sighed. The Princess became sincerely sorrowful.

"You frighten me! Do not wonder that I am alarmed; she is a near relation of mine."

"I understand," answered Talleyrand. "Pray believe me, that out of respect for you, Princess, I will do my best."

"I am infinitely obliged."

At this moment there was a movement among the servants in the portico, and Pani Walewska, followed by her husband, entered. Talleyrand put his *lorgnon* to his eyes and began to look with the air of a connoisseur at Pani Walewska, observing her every movement, every fold of her trailing dress.

On her side, the Princess could hardly conceal her emotion.

"It is unpardonable! What a caprice! I begged, I besought. So much the worse for her, so much the worse."

M. de Périgord did not have time to share the Princess's indignation.

Pani Walewska and her husband greeted him. Talleyrand mumbled some compliment, and offered his arm to the Chamberlain's wife, while Pan Walewski conducted the Princess.

They directed their steps to the dancing-hall.

The Princess moved her fan rapidly; the Chamberlain coughed, and with his left hand adjusted the great riband of the Order.

Talleyrand exchanged with Pani Walewska a few short, commonplace words.

All seemed to be moved, uncertain.

At the threshold of the dancing-hall the Princess whispered with trembling voice to her brother, pointing at his wife walking in front of them: "How could you permit?"

The Chamberlain frowned so much that his wig moved, and he answered with pained voice—

"In the last moment she refused. I could do nothing."

"But it is awful—in such a frock!"

"Only to contradict. But for duty, I would have given up."

"But what will the people say?" burst out the Princess Jablonowska.

In answer to that exclamation, there came from the room a long whisper. A strange, incomprehensible whisper, which deprived even Talleyrand of his usual assurance, so much so that he seemed to have the air of a victim accomplishing a most painful duty, bending under the burden of righteous scorn of hurt public opinion.

In the crowded room the whispers increased. The uniforms embroidered with gold and silver made way, variegated evening dresses and frocks shining with diamonds drew aside—all eyes turned on Pani Walewska.

This interest was spontaneous, for Pani Walewska appeared as a contrast to everything in that shining and gorgeous ball, which was constituted as a superb decoration for majesty, a background for Bonaparte's might and power, an expression of respect and standard of beauty. Pani Walewska dared to challenge fashion, Court requirements, ideas of etiquette, the advice of powerful Joubert, the Princess's hints, and her husband's wishes. Pani Walewska went to the ball of the Prime Minister, almost to the Emperor's ball, in a white tulle dress, unadorned with any embroideries, lace, or precious stones! There was not one artificial flower in her luxuriant hair, nor one bud on her bodice. Pani Walewska in such a frock with bent head seemed to be a Cinderella, a chambermaid, dragged to a drawing-room as a spectacle to the *grand monde*.

The whisper passed gradually into noisy talk: first shots of malicious remarks fell, the ironical smiles passed even to the most indulgent, when Talleyrand noticed the Prince of Berg coming to him, and stopped in the centre of the room.

Murat approached them with constrained politeness.

"Ah, if I am not mistaken, it is Pani Walewska? Pray introduce me."

M. de Périgord pronounced his title swiftly.

Murat bowed slightly, and began to look up and down the Chamberlain's wife, speaking slowly.

"For some time I have wished to meet you—I am very glad—— If I am not mistaken . . ."

Pani Walewska lifted her head, the blood flushed her pale face.

Murat stopped in his sentence, looking with surprise at the Chamberlain's wife.

His astonishment communicated itself to those around him.

As Pani Walewska now stood with lifted head, one could see the depth of her dark, sapphire-like eyes. The whiteness of her bare shoulders competed with her snow-white dress; from every line of her classical features, every fold of her simple

dress, came forth pride mingled with simplicity; she seemed a goddess come down amongst mortals; she looked like the morning star, shining brighter than the others, resembling a ray of sunshine amongst the light of the lamps.

There were again whispers—long—quiet.

A crowd of uniforms and evening dresses surrounded Pani Walewska; words of praise, admiration, rapture were heard more and more.

In the meanwhile, Pani Walewska was able to answer a few words to Murat, then, fired by the looks of the crowd, she blushed, looking round for a place of escape from intruding eyes. She seemed to say, I did not try to increase my beauty; I did not wish to attract your attention by my modest frock and absence of diamonds; I did not take even a flower. Then by what are you attracted? why do you not permit me to pass?

M. de Périgord, who did not yet realise the change of impression which had taken hold of his guests, and who remembered only that he was conducting a lady dressed like a country girl, took advantage of Murat's silence to make his way through the crowd of uniforms and evening dresses, and to lead Pani Walewska to a sofa standing in a corner of the room. Then he bowed and left her again under the tutelage of her husband and Princess Jablonowska. The latter, full of indignation from offended fashion and wounded ambition, did not fail to tell Pani Walewska how dissatisfied she was.

"*Ma chère!* You did as you wished, and look what happened. It is impossible to raise one's eyes; it seems as if you wanted to show that you have not the slightest knowledge about a Court reception. Excuse me, but it is painful."

Pani Walewska answered quietly: "I did not know that I should be a cause of pain."

The Princess looked inquisitively at Pani Walewska's lovely face, and added more kindly: "A person who has no experience should listen to those who have. What a pity! A dark blue dress would be so becoming to you."

Pani Walewska felt piqued involuntarily by coquettishness.

"Is it possible that my dress is so very unbecoming to me?"

"Undoubtedly, although you look charming to-night; but how much more lovely you could look! As it is, it is uncertain.

Talleyrand was sour. I noticed it. It is doubtful if you will be presented to the Emperor."

"Is that so?" exclaimed Pani Walewska, with evident contentment in her voice.

The Princess looked severely at her sister-in-law.

"Marie! at least remember Anastazy. Ah, Count Herceau! How do you do? Marie, permit me——"

"I have had the pleasure of meeting Madame Walewska," said the Count, bowing very elegantly, "and that is why I dare to ask permission to introduce to you one of the young officers of the guard, M. Bertrand."

"With pleasure," consented the Princess.

Herceau nodded to a lieutenant standing not far off.

Pani Walewska felt Bertrand's expressive look, heard the clatter of spurs, answered the compliments mechanically which were addressed to her, and she breathed freely, thinking that she had got rid of a commonplace formality, when Bertrand was followed by Montbrun, Montbrun by Duroc, Duroc by Milhaud, Milhaud by Flahaut, and then uniform after uniform, evening dress after evening dress, crowded round Pani Walewska. The Chamberlain's wife could hardly conceal her confusion. With an effort she listened to often exaggerated homage; from time to time she glanced at the crowd of men timidly, as if she would ask them why they put her into that pillory. The Princess during this homage found an opportunity to whisper to her.

"Do you see! And what would it be if—— Look at Gutakowska, Lubinska, and others, all have velvet dresses to-day. Had you put on your diadem, you would have eclipsed even Sobolewska. Poor Anastazy! I tell you, one can see how much he suffers."

At last the crowd of men became thinner round Pani Walewska; now the older and principal ones came with greeting.

The Princess saved Pani Walewska the trouble of finding answers which required to correspond with the rank and merits of those who were introduced.

Count Herceau and Lieutenant Bertrand alone did not give up their position near Pani Walewska, and tried by turns to continue the conversation with her.

"I was in despair," said the Count in a puling voice. "I nearly lost hope that you would forgive me."

"I do not understand your despair."

"But I feel it!" rejoined Bertrand; "and if I did not share it, it is because I have the honour and pleasure of seeing you for the first time."

"Better add, not only to see, but also to admire."

"You are too kind indeed."

"Rather, too avaricious in words," corrected Bertrand.

"My dear sir, do you not know that there are moments when the excess of sentiment stops words?"

"Certainly I do know it; and you, Madame?"

"I think that the Count is only inclined to hasty compliments."

"Upon my honour, Madame," protested Herceau, "never before was I as sincere as now."

"I must be malicious."

"Pray listen to me: one of the most famous astrologers read in the book of my life that a woman would bewitch me, would dazzle me, would enrapture me, chain me to her chariot for ever. I doubted until now about the trustworthiness of the prediction, but to-day I am convinced."

Pani Walewska did not take the trouble to answer such an exaggerated declaration.

Bertrand looked in an unfriendly manner at the Count, and wishing to gain an advantage over him, said to Pani Walewska, with a bow, "Can I have the honour of dancing a quadrille with you?"

"I do not know."

On Bertrand's expressive face a sincere disappointment appeared. "It would be such a pleasure for me."

"My sister-in-law dances so little," the Princess suddenly said, having caught the lieutenant's request, notwithstanding that she was talking to someone else.

"But if . . ." insisted Bertrand.

The Princess answered, "I doubt very much."

Pani Walewska grew pale, and said to the confused Bertrand: "Is it for a quadrille? I accept."

The lieutenant rang his spurs and looked triumphantly at the disappointed Herceau.

The Princess could hardly conceal her irritation. It was evident that she wanted to scold Pani Walewska, who pretended to be so much occupied in conversing with Bertrand, that the Princess was obliged to give up the attempt.

But it was too much for Princess Jablonowska; therefore, having noticed her brother standing near, she nodded to him, and when he came, she said with a sorrowful tone, "*Mon cher!* I am afraid for Marie! Doctor Corvisart recommended her to be very careful, and she proposes to dance a quadrille with Lieutenant Bertrand."

Before the Chamberlain was able to answer, the lieutenant, having heard his name, turned to him, and, putting out his hand, introduced himself solemnly.

"Bertrand, aide-de-camp on the general staff of his Majesty."

"I am very pleased," mumbled the Chamberlain; and when Bertrand turned again to Pani Walewska, he understood the meaning of the Princess's words, and rapped noisily on his snuff-box.

The Princess whispered to him again.

"Do you understand? A quadrille with a lieutenant!"

"It is impossible. Prince Borghese has just asked."

"I assure you she promised."

"I shall not allow it."

"Naturally—you have the right!"

The Chamberlain was ready to carry out his threat, when a whisper ran through the room: "The Emperor! the Emperor!"

The hum of voices ceased; all eyes were turned to the entrance. After a moment, Talleyrand's sonorous voice resounded—

"*L'Empereur!*"

The band played a polonaise. All the assembly rose from their seats.

Napoleon entered—stopped at the threshold as if to allow himself to be looked at—then, preceded by Talleyrand, and followed by Duroc, Wybicki, and Prince Poniatowski, walked nervously towards the centre of the room.

The crowd of M. de Périgord's guests wavered, enlarged the circle, and bent their heads breathless before the ruler.

Faces burned, eyes shone, hearts throbbed quicker than

usual; a shiver ran through those who had seen him already, and through those who beheld him for the first time.

Napoleon did not disappoint the highest expectations. Half-opened lips, strained looks, the most stiffnecked bent before him, appreciating that here also he was the man of whom the soldiers of the Polish legions sang, the man depicted in Dombrowski's and Wybicki's reports, the man characterised in the news from Marengo, Austerlitz, and Jena, the man whom they wished him to be. The same uniform of *Chasseurs à cheval*, green with red, the same white vest, with the tiny red ribbon of the *Légion d'honneur*, the same magnetically penetrating look, and the same gloomy fold between his eyebrows.

Napoleon stood in the centre of the dancing-hall, and turned to the Grand Marshal of the Court.

Duroc understood the meaning of that movement, for he bent a little before the Emperor, and whispered: "To the left, under the mirror—in a white dress."

After a little, Napoleon turned his head in the direction indicated by Duroc, his glance pierced the crowds of women and men, passed over several faces, and stopped where Pani Walewska stood leaning on Bertrand's arm.

The presentation began.

Wybicki, Poniatowski, and Talleyrand stood behind the Emperor in order to help him to recognise persons and talk pleasantly to them.

"Malachowski, the chairman of the Diet," spoke Wybicki, behind the Emperor.

"He was not well," added Talleyrand, from the other side.

Napoleon hardly looked at the aged man, and said: "Ah! I am glad. How is your wife?"

Malachowski shivered slightly, failing to understand what was the meaning of the inquiry about his wife, who had died long before; but ere he could say a word, Wybicki had already presented another dignitary.

"Thomas Ostrowski!"

"A member of the temporary Government; he works very hard," added Poniatowski hurriedly.

"I hope you are enjoying yourself, for the Carnival is very brilliant," said the Emperor in conclusion, to Ostrowski.

Those who stood near could hardly conceal their astonishment. Talleyrand covered his mouth with a handkerchief, Poniatowski bit his lips, Wybicki grew red, Ostrowski bent his grey head and toyed slightly with his Orders. Duroc again whispered something into the Emperor's ear. Napoleon frowned severely, but from that moment he followed the whispered indications better.

When the Emperor passed from the men to the women his distraction returned, and it bordered sometimes on impertinence.

The old Princess Ossolinska learned from the Emperor that grey was becoming to her; young and beautiful Countess Thomas Lubienska was asked when her son entered the army; stout Pani Wojczynska had a compliment that she must dance well; fair-haired Pani Sobolewska was told that only dark-haired women could claim to be beautiful; the Princess Dominik Radziwil, powdered according to old fashion, had the honour of hearing from the imperial mouth that her complexion was very fresh.

Wybicki perspired, Poniatowski was red, Talleyrand made comical faces. In the meantime, enormities said by Napoleon were abundantly distributed to the right and left.

The Emperor did not pay any attention to whispered information, to pronounced names; he walked quicker and quicker, passed some ladies unceremoniously, and approached the most remote corner of the room where stood the Countess Alexandre Potocka and Pani Walewska.

Napoleon's every movement, his every word, signified that he wished to finish the tedious ceremony as soon as possible; that he did not care to enter into society requirements, that he came here to command, and not to follow forms and customs.

After having said some more words, which almost paralysed the curtseying ladies, the Emperor stopped before the Countess Alexandre Potocka, who, dressed in velvet and shining with diamonds, was famous for her beauty under her maiden name of Anetka Tyszkiewicz.

"You will dance the quadrille with me?" said Napoleon Bonaparte drily, looking constantly in the direction where Pani Walewska stood.

Anetka raised her dark expressive eyes slowly, and said with a charming smile: "Sire, I am very grateful for the honour."

At the sound of the Countess Potocka's voice, Napoleon only now turned to her, glanced at her elegant figure full of undeniable charm.

"You are very interesting."

"Sire!"

"You are able to make an impression."

"Sire, where you stop . . ."

"Looking at you, one must believe that the Polish ladies are beautiful. Yes! here one can be captured!"

"Sire," said the Countess Potocka without hesitation, "it is your destiny to be victorious."

Napoleon made a slight grimace, and asked abruptly: "How are your children?" and not waiting for an answer, began to talk with Wybicki.

During that conversation, unfortunate for the Countess Potocka, Duroc left the Emperor and went to Pani Walewska.

"May I present my respects to you?"

"Ah, it is you!" said Pani Walewska, blushing.

"I do not know how to express my gratitude for your coming."

Lieutenant Bertrand, standing beside Pani Walewska, retreated respectfully.

Princess Jablonowska and the Chamberlain drew nearer, trying to catch Duroc's look in order to greet him, but he did not cease talking to Pani Walewska.

"We considered it our duty. M. de Périgord, Prince of Benevento, was kind enough——"

"He only fulfilled the command! You cannot doubt that some one else wished to see you here."

"I do not know—I do not understand."

"You shall have an opportunity to convince yourself. Can I ask you for the honour of dancing a quadrille with you?"

"I am very much obliged, and sorry. I have promised it to Lieutenant Bertrand."

Duroc turned to the officer and smiled cunningly.

"Ah! if it is so, then permit me to be first after Lieutenant Bertrand."

"Certainly!" answered Pani Walewska, not trying to conceal

her joy that she had escaped so easily from dancing with Duroc, and, what was more important, from having to listen to his irritating insinuations.

Duroc now turned to the Princess and the Chamberlain, and said a few polite words to them.

The Princess, who was moved by Duroc's conversation with her sister-in-law, deemed it her duty to smooth down the refusal to dance.

"We are so sorry! But it is done. Marie, naturally, notwithstanding her willingness, could not withdraw the promise given to M. Bertrand."

The Marshal smiled ironically.

"A tardy applicant. I was favoured too much. . . . I have the second place."

"Do you know Lieutenant Bertrand?"

"Yes, he is a very able officer; he has a splendid future before him."

"One word," said the Chamberlain, who had attempted several times to take part in the conversation.

"Yes."

"Is the presentation finished?"

Duroc looked in the direction where Napoleon was talking with Wybicki.

"I think so. His Majesty is tired, for it is tiring."

"Certainly, but . . . my wife had not the honour to be presented. She was not able to go to the Castle the other day."

Duroc laughed involuntarily, but he refrained immediately, and said with sincere compassion—

"What a pity! Perhaps there will still be an opportunity. I shall remember it. It is justly due to you. It seems that the Emperor did not talk with you to-day."

"I kept aside."

"Notwithstanding, his Majesty remembers you well."

Duroc withdrew adroitly and disappeared amongst the uniforms.

The Chamberlain looked reproachfully at his wife, and said—

"A nice position! He is evidently hurt! At such a ball to grant a dance to a lieutenant! What a success!"

"The Emperor is dancing with Anetka!" said Princess

Jablonowska, who had already succeeded in catching the whisper circulating the room.

"Is it possible?" said the Chamberlain doubtfully.

"It is certain; Potocki knows how to push himself. His father is already with Wybicki."

The Chamberlain impatiently rapped on his new imperial snuff-box.

"Yes, yes, everybody helps him; his son Alexandre, daughter-in-law, and wife."

"One may sit down," was whispered through the room.

Pani Walewska, taking advantage of the confusion produced by the people looking for seats, went quickly to her place under the mirror in order to avoid her husband's further complaints and the Princess's reproaches. Here on the sofa, occupied by several ladies, access was more difficult, and the conversation was general.

The Chamberlain, seeing this manœuvre, set his teeth; the Princess moved her fan vehemently, and was obliged to follow Pani Walewska's example, and having found as her neighbour the Countess Moszynska, began to talk with her.

The centre of the ballroom became less crowded, groups of uniforms and evening dresses drew aside, permitting all to look at what was going on.

The sight was unusual, indeed, even for those who showed sour faces to their king, looked at his Majesty with proudly uplifted heads and uttered haughty words.

In the centre of the room Napoleon stood exchanging short words with Wybicki. Behind the Emperor, Prince Joseph Poniatowski with Murat seemed to wait for a word from the Emperor.

Bonaparte appeared not to see them. . . . Suddenly Talleyrand came from the other room of the palace and went straight to the Emperor, carrying a glass of lemonade on a golden tray. Talleyrand, feeling that everybody was looking at him, drooped his head and set his lips tight.

He stopped near Napoleon and extended his arm with the tray, but the Emperor did not seem to notice him.

A long, trying moment passed. At last Napoleon turned negligently towards Talleyrand.

"Ah! what is it? Lemonade? I do not need it."

The minister bowed respectfully, and went away with the tray. This scene gave material for whispers and comment.

"Prime Minister! Such a dignitary!" wondered the Poles.

"Service, etiquette!" explained marshals and generals.

"The part of a lackey is very becoming to him," murmured the republicans, clad in imperial uniforms.

"How *gêné* he must feel," said the women compassionately.

"He could not do the same with us," whispered Polish noblemen.

Pani Walewska was so much surprised by this scene that she bent towards the Princess, and said: "I could not imagine that M. de Périgord . . ."

"A person who does not know the Court wonders!" answered the Princess sourly.

The Chamberlain, who was again standing behind the sofa, deemed it proper to smile indulgently.

"Court etiquette surprises ignorant people! Pfi! that is nothing! To the late king I handed not a tray, but bumpers."

"But he is a minister!"

"Not better than a chamberlain."

"In Vienna, the etiquette is still more severe," remarked the Princess.

Pani Walewska wished to answer that such etiquette was bordering on humiliation, when the first fanfare, announcing the quadrille, sounded. She heard behind her the clink of Lieutenant Bertrand's spurs. She looked at him, and said: "It is only the first fanfare?"

"Yes, Madame," answered Bertrand, with a trembling voice, "I have to ask your forgiveness that I dared to trouble you."

Bertrand stopped suddenly. Pani Walewska made a movement. "Excuse me, but I do not understand."

"Never before was my uniform such a burden to me as it is just now."

"But——"

"I dared to ask you for a quadrille, having forgotten that the duties of my service might not grant me even an hour of pleasure. I——"

"What, then?"

"I have been ordered to go at once to Silesia to join Marshal Mortier's army corps. In a quarter of an hour I shall be on horseback. There remains nothing for me but to beg of you to excuse me."

"I pity you heartily."

"Thank you for your kind words."

"It is cold and stormy."

"Duty, Madame, but it is a cruel one just now. I dreamed about something else a while ago."

The lieutenant saluted, Pani Walewska put out her little hand to him sympathisingly. Bertrand kissed it respectfully, clanked his spurs, and went out.

The Princess smiled with satisfaction; the Chamberlain rapped on his snuff-box joyously; Pani Walewska became thoughtful. She pitied Bertrand, such an agreeable young man; he had drawn Duroc away from her.

"Well, I hinted to you. Now you will be obliged to sit during the dance, for it is too late; also it would not be proper for me to seek a partner for you," said the Chamberlain.

"Better not to dance than have such an honour," said the Princess.

"I am not of your opinion; I liked Lieutenant Bertrand."

"*Chère Marie!* he would be a very proper partner in the country house of a petty nobleman."

"What do you say, Princess?" asked Countess Moszynska.

"Well, *Marie, après une maladie,* must be very careful. She cannot dance even a quadrille."

"Oh! *La pauvre, c'est trop ennuyant!*"

"*Parfaitement—et surtout* to refuse the Grand Marshal of the Court."

"The Prince of Friul?"

"*Mais oui!*"

Countess Moszynska doubted.

"What a pity!"

The second fanfare was now heard. The couples began to form in fours, the seats round the ballroom grew empty.

The Chamberlain was in a rage, seeing that Murat stood beside Princess Lubomirska, Prince Borghese beside the Countess Lubienska, the Duke of Bassano was conducting

Krasinska, Davoust walked awkwardly with Pani Gutakowska, Talleyrand kept company with Pani Sobolewska, Prince Joseph Poniatowski offered his arm to Princess Radziwil, even daughters and wives of petty noblemen were going to dance with generals and other superior officers.

The orchestra played the third fanfare; Napoleon moved slowly, and extended his arm to the Countess Alexandre Potocka.

Darkness covered the Chamberlain's eyes.

"The Potockis push themselves forward," said the Princess.

"Anetka with the Emperor!" rejoined the Countess Moszynska.

"But who is the Emperor's vis-à-vis?"

"In such a crowd, I suppose, as it happens—for . . ."

The Princess had no time to finish her sentence, for suddenly Duroc appeared before Pani Walewska, who became confused, while the Princess, the Chamberlain, and Countess Moszynska surrounded her.

"I came to claim the promise of the second chance."

Pani Walewska rose; Duroc offered her his arm, and conducted her to the centre of the ballroom, where, round the Emperor, according to Talleyrand's indication, the couples bearing the most distinguished names were gathered.

"I can hardly express," said Duroc, conducting Pani Walewska, "how happy I am to be able to take the lieutenant's place."

"I pitied him heartily."

"It is his fault."

"I do not understand," said Pani Walewska, surprised at the Marshal's strange intonation of his words.

Duroc smiled imperceptibly.

"The duties of the ordnance officers in the Imperial general staff are merciless."

Pani Walewska could not get over her uneasiness, and asked Duroc: "With whom are we going to dance?"

"Have you any doubts?"

"I do not know."

"Do you think that you will be permitted to dance with any one else! Excuse me! The Master of the Ceremonies,

M. de Ségur, makes a sign! Pray be so kind—a little to the left."

"But the Emperor is going to dance there."

"Precisely, we are his vis-à-vis."

The music of a quadrille sounded. Napoleon, with the Countess Alexandre Potocka, came slowly opposite Duroc and Pani Walewska.

The Chamberlain's wife could hardly hear the time of the music; she made blunders in the figures, did not hear the elegant conversation with which Duroc tried to entertain her, did not notice looks of astonishment directed towards her by other couples.

Pani Walewska, although she carried her head high, although her wide-opened eyes showed their mysterious depth, seemed to be a marble figure. In her delicately chiselled face there was not one drop of blood; her half-opened lips seemed to be two petals of a white rose; she could not breathe.

Sometimes there passed before her a green uniform, the red riband of the Legion of Honour; but the sounds of the orchestra, and M. de Ségur's solemn announcing of figures, Duroc's words, the gliding of feet, the clatter of spurs, and noise of conversation mingled in one horrible whirlpool.

To Pani Walewska thoughts came, the remembrance of the modest rooms of her parents' residence, her father's stern face, Paul's never-forgotten departure to the Polish Legion, the first meeting with Gorayski, and then picture after picture till Lieutenant Bertrand's departure.

Pani Walewska could not understand herself the reason for the stupor which oppressed her. She tried to answer Duroc; she even moved her lips; she saw that the Marshal bent quickly towards her, but the words that were coming changed into an imperceptible whisper. Suddenly Pani Walewska felt that Duroc conducted her forward, and in the meanwhile she felt a long, nervous, strong, merciless pressure of a hand. Pani Walewska concentrated her faculties. Napoleon stood in front of her.

"*Malheureuse victime!*"

"Sire," stammered poor Pani Walewska in a whisper.

"*Je n'ai vu que vous.*"

The blood rushed to her head; Bonaparte's look burned her, consumed her. The Emperor made a mistake in the figure. Duroc again seized Pani Walewska's hand.

"How do you like my dancing?" Napoleon asked the Countess Potocka suddenly, to whom he had not said a word until now.

"Sire! for a great man you dance wonderfully well."

"But not for a partner such as you are."

"Sire, on the contrary."

"Who is that lady dancing opposite?" The Countess Potocka smiled maliciously.

Napoleon, seeing that she guessed his thoughts, added quickly: "How do you like her?"

"Very much, were it not for her dress."

"What have you to say against it?"

"Ah! Sire! It is too simple; but it is not her fault. She came from a poor family, and her husband is not a spendthrift."

Bonaparte bit his lips. "But you have a whole jeweller's shop on you."

Anetka Tyszkiewicz grew confused; her usual boldness and wit disappeared; the dart, instead of piercing her victim, was turned against herself. "These are my family jewels, Sire."

"Your ancestors would have done better to spend money for keeping an army."

"In such a solemn moment! . . ."

"You could get along without such solemnity."

Anetka wished to answer, but Napoleon did not permit her to say another word; he turned and looked imperatively at M. de Ségur. The Master of the Ceremonies understood that look; the orchestra played a march, and the quadrille was ended.

Napoleon nodded slightly to the Countess Potocka, and sat down in an armchair standing near. A crowd of gorgeous uniforms surrounded him in the twinkling of an eye.

Talleyrand rushed again with a glass of lemonade.

The Emperor smiled to him, and said kindly: "Ah! lemonade. Yes; with pleasure. Beautiful ball! Where is Berthier?"

"I am here, Sire!" responded the Marshal.

"You quarrelled again with Davoust?"

"Sire!"

"Do not deny it—I saw it. You behave like schoolboys! Well, which of the ladies present do you find the most beautiful?"

Berthier smiled. "Sire, the answer is not difficult. The Princess Lubomirska."

The Emperor made a grimace.

"I suppose because she reminds you of Madame Walewska?"

Berthier was confused. "Yes, certainly, Sire; that is what I meant!" said Berthier, much surprised; and having seized the opportunity when the Emperor was talking to the Duke of Bassano, he disappeared amongst the crowd of evening dresses and uniforms, asking about Pani Walewska in order to assure her of his admiration.

In the meanwhile, Napoleon's eyes wandered inquisitively round the ballroom, resting on the spot where Pani Walewska, surrounded by numerous uniforms, answered as best she could the enthusiastic compliments of General Montbrun and the Master of the Horse, Colonel Durosnel.

A vertical fold appeared between Bonaparte's eyebrows.

"Duroc! Where is Duroc?"

The Prince of Friul stood erect. The Emperor rapped the arm of the chair. Duroc bent.

"Montbrun to Danzig, under Lefèbvre's command; Durosnel shall return to Paris. At once!"

Duroc saluted. The commander crossed the ballroom. Montbrun and Durosnel disappeared from the circle of Pani Walewska's admirers, to the great pleasure of Count Herceau, who, notwithstanding trouble and confusion among the officers, drew near Pani Walewska, and with all the freedom of a courtier who had spent half his life at Versailles, began to entertain her with his conversation.

"How do you like the ball?"

"Very much; it is very interesting."

"Undoubtedly. An interesting *bal masqué*—Jacobins playing court! You understand how much we suffer from that parody. I do not say anything against the Emperor, but those who surround him. One could count the true noblemen on ten fingers."

"I understand your dislike as an emigrant, and the Bourbons'

partisan. You must, however, avow that France never has been as mighty as she is now."

"Yes; but those——"

"It is they that have made her so great. Do you not think so?"

"I! At this moment I only know that I love. I am so intoxicated that, although I know it is wrong, I do not think of giving up."

Count Herceau half closed his eyes, began to turn one finger round the others; his large mouth smiled, and he waited for an answer.

At that moment there appeared before the Count Herceau the tall figure of the Chamberlain d'Hédouville.

"Madame, will you excuse me? Count, the Prince of Benevento begs a few minutes' conversation with you."

Herceau hastened to answer: "I am at M. de Périgord's service."

M. d'Hédouville was not satisfied with this answer. He was shocked by the tone of the reply, which sounded like the Count's independence, for he said—

"The Prince wishes to see you at once on a matter of importance."

Herceau moved slowly.

"Madame, pray excuse me. M. d'Hédouville, you have not any idea how much I sacrifice just now to M. de Périgord."

The Count bowed to Pani Walewska in a courtly way, and followed M. d'Hédouville, wondering inwardly at the unexpected invitation.

When the Count was going to leave the ballroom, it seemed to him that he noticed the Prince of Benevento, and therefore he stopped.

"It seems that M. de Périgord is here."

"It may be; but he asked you to be kind enough to come to his study. He will come presently."

Herceau looked hesitatingly at M. d'Hédouville.

"Are you sure?"

"Certainly. Be so kind!" said M. d'Hédouville persistently.

Herceau sighed and followed, not a little astonished at the unexpected affair which Talleyrand wished to communicate to him.

In the Count's mind there rose a crowd of suppositions.

Talleyrand needed him. . . . Talleyrand wished to win him. . . . Talleyrand must have heard of the Herceaus. He needed men with good names, familiar with the local conditions of the country.

The Count felt so exalted by the mission undoubtedly expected of him that he said to M. d'Hédouville indulgently—

"Ah, that de Périgord! What a bother I have with that de Périgord! It is always thus with him."

M. d'Hédouville looked askance at Herceau.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, always some affairs, always urgent business. But . . . where are we going to?"

"To that room to the left."

"Ah, yes; it is true," affirmed Herceau, wishing M. d'Hédouville to understand that it was not the first time he had been there.

M. d'Hédouville did not answer, but conducted Herceau to a small, square room, in which two lieutenants of the guard were sitting in full uniform. They rose quickly at the sight of M. d'Hédouville, who greeted them kindly, and introduced them to Herceau.

"M. Rousseau. M. de la Rochefoucauld."

"Delighted!"

"Permit me to leave you, Count. The Prince of Benevento will be here presently."

Before Count Herceau could answer, M. d'Hédouville, having said a few words to Lieutenant Rousseau, disappeared.

Count Herceau began to walk across the room, not paying any attention to the two officers whispering aside.

The room in which they asked Count Herceau to wait appeared to him rather peculiar for the waiting-room of a Prime Minister, because, besides a fireplace, a table, a sofa, and a couple of chairs, there was no other furniture.

Count Herceau, however, recollected that the Prime Minister was only here accidentally and for a short time, and then he again tried to guess the reason which caused M. de Périgord to ask him so suddenly for an interview.

In the meanwhile, time was passing, and Count Herceau

began to look impatiently at his bomb-like watch, and to walk more and more quickly up and down the room; finally he stopped abruptly, looked at the officers, and said—

"M. Périgord does not come!"

"The Prince is occupied!" answered Rousseau phlegmatically.

"Bah! . . . His Majesty has not left yet," added de la Rochefoucauld.

Herceau opened his eyes wide.

"H'm! . . . Yes, but he was coming."

"Then he will come."

"Perhaps you would like something to drink or to eat; we have everything at your disposition."

"No, thank you, it is too late."

"It is true."

"Perhaps M. de Périgord will not come?"

"There is no doubt that he will."

"But I cannot wait any longer; pray, tell him that I waited, but I shall see him in the ballroom. Good-bye."

The officers looked at each other significantly, and barred the way.

"Count, you must excuse——"

"Count, I am sure you will not refuse."

"The Prince begged of you to be kind enough to wait."

"One moment more. The Prince will be so sorry."

Herceau, after a minute's hesitation, gave in. The officers tried to surpass each other in politeness, asking him again to have something to drink.

The Count thanked them, but could hardly master his irritation. Finally, in order to pass the time, he began to chat with the officers.

"What are you doing here?"

"Oh, nothing! On duty. . . ."

"Such is our luck! The day of the ball."

"All our comrades are there!"

"And such an opportunity happens very seldom. . . ."

"Yes, but you must?"

"Yes, twenty-four hours in full uniform."

"Sometimes there is nothing to do, and sometimes courier after courier comes in. You will see, as soon as the Emperor

returns, at least for two hours the door will not close. . . . Sometimes the Emperor works till daybreak. . . ."

"Yes, so I have heard. And this room? What is it used for?"

"This room? It is for the orderly officers; it communicates by a corridor on the right with the office, and to the left are stairs conducting to the guard-rooms."

This news was disagreeable to Count Herceau; they made him wait in a room destined for service.

He made a movement. "I beg to thank you for your company, but I cannot wait any longer. Good-bye."

Rochefoucauld bowed elegantly.

"You will not deprive us of the pleasure . . ."

"I do not understand . . ."

"You will be kind enough to stay."

"No, I must postpone the pleasure of seeing M. de Périgord."

"The Prince wished to-day . . ."

"I shall see him in the ballroom! Good-bye!"

Herceau turned to the door, but Lieutenant Rousseau barred it, and said emphatically: "You will be kind enough to stay with us."

"I would do it with pleasure, but I must return to the ball."

"It will end at any moment."

"So much more reason . . ."

"It is of no consequence . . "

"That concerns me. . . Permit me!"

Rousseau did not budge. "You will remain with us."

"What?" stammered Herceau, who only now noticed the lieutenant's determined tone.

"You will stay here," said Rochefoucauld. "Pray, be seated."

"I will not stay!" burst out Herceau.

"In that case we shall be obliged to use force."

"What! Then it is violence?"

"No. Only when you refuse our request."

Herceau sat on the sofa, and put his perfumed handkerchief to his nose. He could not doubt but that he was caught and imprisoned.

After a short space he recovered his self-possession, and said: "It must be a mistake."

"Probably."

"Then I do not understand the reason. . . . I must be going to the ball. I cannot refuse myself such a pleasure. I am a Frenchman, as you are! Upon my honour! . . . Do not deprive me of the pleasure of seeing the Emperor."

Rousseau smiled ironically.

"Is it true that you . . . are so anxious?"

"Upon my word!"

"I was told that as an emigrant you were a faithful adherent of the Bourbons."

"I? I? What an idea! I left the country because the storm was too violent . . . for the sake of peace. But as for the Bourbons!"

"But it was said so," rejoined la Rochefoucauld, winking at Rousseau.

"Gossip! Upon my honour! gossip! I! The Emperor has but few such admirers . . . for I say nothing! I keep aside, admire and say nothing!"

"That is true!" affirmed the officers.

Herceau looked uneasily towards the door, and tried to parley.

"Evidently a mistake. . . . I was talking with Prince Borghese, when Chamberlain d'Hédouville said to me that M. de Périgord . . . I mean the Prince of Benevento. Therefore, naturally . . . He was coming here . . . I was waiting. . . . But now, I do not understand."

"But it is so clear," said Rousseau. "You must wait still."

"But you said yourself that probably the Prince of Benevento is busy."

"There is no doubt about it."

"Then . . ."

"You stay with us."

"But I cannot. I will not!"

"That does not change the situation."

"Then you wish to commit violence?"

"Not at all, only we will take the liberty to stop you."

"Even by force?"

"You are too well-bred to force us to do that."

Herceau dropped his head, and began to turn one of his fingers round the other.

When this happened, Pani Walewska, left to herself, took advantage of the groups of people chatting together to nod to her husband, and ask him to give her his arm.

The Chamberlain gallantly did as he was asked.

"What do you wish, my dear?"

"I wish to go to a side drawing-room."

"But is it proper? You were not introduced to His Majesty. Perhaps there will be a chance . . ."

"But permit me . . ."

"If you wish absolutely. . . . Pray! . . . You have no experience. How lucky it was about the quadrille. Princess Radziwil congratulated me a while ago. General astonishment. It will be still greater! Still greater!"

Pani Walewska did not listen to her husband's words, wishing to avoid as soon as possible the eyes which were persecuting her.

In the doorway leading to a side room, Pan and Pani Walewski met the Countess Alexandre Potocka with M. Flahaut and a young officer, Prince Ornano.

"What good luck!" exclaimed the Countess Potocka. "We were just talking about you, dear. Allow me. . . . Prince Ornano."

Pani Walewska had hardly time to answer Prince Ornano's bow, when Countess Potocka pulled her aside, laughing.

"Pray excuse me. . . . We women always have some secrets! My dearest! I had not a moment during the quadrille. I wanted so much to see you! You were unwell?"

"Yes, a little."

"*O, mon Dieu!*" prattled on Anetka Tyszkiewicz continuously "But you are looking charming. I am so glad. What a lovely frock you have! I would only make one fold . . . here . . . from the shoulders. I do admire you. Classical idea! Everybody does not admire it. *L'Empereur!* Did you notice? He simply embarrassed me. He is accustomed to easy victories! I made him understand. Ah! your dress irritated him! I could hardly explain to him. . . . In matters of the beautiful he is very simple. Let me kiss you! Is it true that he gave you a *rendezvous* in Jablonna? No! I thought so. They gossip. They will say anything. Have you heard about Lubomirska?

We must return to the gentlemen. I was talking about you, M. Flahaut."

The aide-de-camp of the Staff bowed.

"I can only thank you."

"Pani Walewska thinks you are sentimental!"

"Anetka!"

"Do you deny it already?"

"Can one be different here? One must surrender at every moment."

"M. Flahaut, you are talking about surrender! Terms?"

"I am ready to accept the most onerous!"

"And you, Chamberlain? Always full of life and vigour!"

"Our generation," began the Chamberlain pompously, but Anetka did not permit him to finish, and turned to Prince Ornano.

"I did as you wished! I am very glad to be a good fairy to you."

"Madame!"

"Yes, Marie! The Prince burned with the desire of being introduced to you! Where are you bound to?"

"It is very warm in the ballroom," explained the Chamberlain.

"And we are going there, Prince! Take advantage of the opportunity, and offer your arm to Mme. Walewska."

Ornano rushed boldly to the Chamberlain's wife.

The Chamberlain made a grimace, but Anetka whispered in his ear, smiling maliciously: "The Emperor's cousin."

The Chamberlain looked doubtfully at Countess Potocka, but she nodded affirmatively, and said aloud—

"*Oui, oui, c'est vrai!*"

The Chamberlain looked respectfully at the officer walking beside his wife, and returned to the ballroom.

Pani Walewska walked, conducted by Prince Ornano, not even trying to break the unpleasant silence. Countess Potocka's words wounded her, and filled her with bitterness. She tried in vain to explain to herself why people were so spiteful to her, why Anetka was so malicious, how they could make up such horrid slander as was that about her *rendezvous* with the Emperor.

In the meanwhile she reproached herself with not having answered; with not having shaken off the timidity of the country girl; with being unable to face the drawing-room conversation, always apparently so sweet but in reality full of wormwood; with having no good answers at command at the moment; and being unable to hide stings in silky words and sweet kisses as Anetka did.

Prince Ornano conducted Pani Walewska through a suite of drawing-rooms, turning from time to time to her as if wishing to catch a thread to begin a conversation.

The silence continued. Pani Walewska, absorbed by her thoughts, did not feel its weight; as for the lieutenant, he seemed to be doubly embarrassed. Several times he opened his mouth, but his voice did not come, and only a blush testified to the young Prince's timidity.

They came to the last drawing-room, and the natural limit forced the Prince to interrupt the silence.

"Will you allow me . . . we must . . ."

Pani Walewska shivered slightly, and having noticed a small sofa in the corner, dropped the lieutenant's arm and went towards it.

The Prince followed her, but not being invited to sit on the sofa, he stood beside it fingering his big bearskin, and looked hesitatingly towards the Chamberlain's wife.

"I am afraid I importune you?"

Pani Walewska, hearing the lieutenant's voice, turned and looked at him in surprise, unable to recollect where she had met him, and how she came to be with him, and what was his name.

"But not at all!" said Pani Walewska, thinking it was her duty to protest.

"It seemed so to me!" stammered Ornano, and became silent, blushing up to his eyes.

Pani Walewska looked with interest at the lieutenant and blushed also. He appeared to her quite different from those haughty satellites of the Emperor, the blusterers on the Staff, so confident in their epaulettes and crosses, Napoleon's eaglets.

Nobleness showed itself even in the lieutenant's movements, which were awkward and full of modesty, while bravery, manli-

ness, and strength shone from his serene forehead, surrounded by raven black hair.

Pani Walewska felt something like remorse for her lack of attention.

"It is rather I who should apologise for my company . . ."

"On the contrary, Madame!" interrupted the lieutenant, and, having met Pani Walewska's look, dropped his eyes, and again fingered his bearskin.

"But," said Pani Walewska to justify herself, "sometimes one is thoughtful."

Ornano nodded affirmatively.

"If I am not mistaken, you serve in the Guards. It is so difficult to remember all the uniforms," said Pani Walewska again.

"Yes, I am a lieutenant of the *Chasseurs à Cheval* of the Guard!" said Ornano, solemnly stretching his tall, well-shaped figure, and putting his hand to his upper lip on which a dark down announced the moustaches.

"I see that now. *Chasseurs à Cheval* of the Guard! It is the uniform which the Emperor likes the best! Although . . ."

"Yes, Madame; the Emperor wears a uniform more cut away, and a white waistcoat instead of our green, then white . . . and slippers . . . for the rest, the same uniform."

Pani Walewska smiled, the lieutenant blushed, but the bashfulness of the officer began to amuse her.

"And Lieutenant Bertrand, is he in the same regiment with you?"

"No, Madame; he is on Marshal Berthier's general staff."

"Ah, yes! You must excuse my ignorance! I mention M. Bertrand, for I pitied him very much. Imagine, a few minutes before the quadrille, he was commanded to go to Silesia! Awful! From a ball on horseback, and for such a journey! The service on the general staff must be very hard."

"It varies! Although with Bertrand . . ." The lieutenant stopped suddenly.

"You wished to say something?"

"Yes. Perhaps better not."

"Is it a secret?"

"Everybody knows it; but you must excuse me, I prefer to be silent than tell a lie."

"And if I ask you to tell me the truth?"

"Then I do not know, but . . . And then, for what do you need that news? Ours . . . service affairs."

"Undoubtedly, but you aroused my curiosity by telling me that everybody knows."

"Because, Madame, I said too much unnecessarily!" said Ornano frankly, and became silent.

Pani Walewska was still more puzzled by a peculiar intonation which she noticed in his voice, and said—

"It is too late now to go back on your word."

"No, no, Madame!" The lieutenant defended himself, looking round. "You must excuse me! Let somebody else tell you."

"Suppose I beg you very earnestly?"

"Then I do not know. You will be angry with me. . . . I would not like to hurt your feelings. They said . . . perhaps there is not a word of truth in it, although . . ." Ornano grew more and more confused. Pani Walewska insisted; he hesitated still a while. Finally, being unable to resist any longer, said abruptly: "Bertrand was sent away because of you!"

"Because of me?" repeated Pani Walewska, with astonishment.

Ornano grew crimson.

"Yes . . . it is . . . I do not know myself. Perhaps it is only gossip. It must be!"

"I must insist on your explaining yourself."

"I did not express myself well. It is not exactly you, but the quadrille was the cause."

"I do not understand."

The lieutenant breathed heavily, and began to talk quickly.

"It is Bertrand's fault! He dared to ask you for a quadrille without having asked M. de Ségur whether he might do so! It is Bertrand's fault! It was in the programme that you were going to dance vis-à-vis with the Emperor! Marshal Duroc could not do otherwise. Bertrand was not on the service list, but as he was guilty they changed the order, and sent him away."

Pani Walewska did not know what to answer. Ornano tried to lessen the weight of his words: "Bertrand acted carelessly.

He should remember that there was a programme; he was in Duroc's way!"

"I pity M. Bertrand."

"He was well rewarded."

"In what way?"

"He had the honour of talking with you . . , he was one of the first. . . . Is it not enough? After that, let come the worst of orders, even to the end of the world."

Ornano said the last words with such enthusiasm that Pani Walewska shivered.

"I thank you for such a compliment."

"It is not a compliment, it is the truth, upon the word of an officer!"

The lieutenant stopped suddenly, and still more than before fingered his bearskin.

Pani Walewska wished to be severe for his daring, but having looked at his sincere face, stopped in the first syllable of her phrase, and having dropped her eyes, she played with her fan.

"Perhaps . . . I . . ."

Pani Walewska raised her eyes. The lieutenant put his chin in the large red collar of his uniform, and again said with determination: "Madame, pray forgive me. . . . I did not wish to hurt your feelings. . . . I would not dare. . . ."

"I am not angry, only if my request carries any weight . . ."

"Command me!"

"Give up those Court ways."

"I swear to you that it is the honest truth."

"So much the more I could not listen to it."

The lieutenant grew sad suddenly.

"Yes, it is true."

"But I do not wonder . . . you are searching for impressions; the more camp life takes you away from society, the more you take advantage of every opportunity. Perhaps you do not know yourself, that unwittingly you fall into the same tones, commonplace gallantry, half words, tender looks, sighings. You address yourself to every side; it seems to you that the admiration which they have here for your uniforms allows you to trample . . ."

"Madame!" whispered the lieutenant, with sincere terror.

Pani Walewska laughed.

"You must not take all that to yourself. I do not understand myself where all that came to me from. I do believe that you think differently. How long is it since you joined the army?"

"More than one year; when I left school."

"And always with the Emperor? It must be a great happiness to remain at the side of such a great man."

The lieutenant's eyes shone.

"There is a sergeant in our regiment who speaks to the Emperor as 'thou!' And the Emperor knows every one of his soldiers by name. When he is in a good humour we call him simply 'Little Corporal.'"

"I can imagine how the regiment must love him!"

"Our regiment of *Chasseurs à Cheval?* But we are always with him and round him! In his headquarters, at the reviews, on the roads, on the battlefield, day and night! Nothing can happen without the *Chasseurs à Cheval* of the Guard. Grenadiers, dragoons, would like to be in our place—in vain. We are always at the head, we are always first! And there is not one amongst us who would not permit himself to be cut in pieces for him, who, at his sign, would not jump over a precipice, who would not sacrifice everything for him."

Ornano here met Pani Walewska's eyes looking at him with interest, and grew pale.

"Who would not sacrifice for him everything," he repeated, with less assurance.

"With such an army to conquer . . ."

"He must!" ended the lieutenant, with conviction.

"Permit me, Marie, the Prince of Neufchatel!" resounded suddenly in the Chamberlain's hoarse voice.

Berthier stood before her. The lieutenant stretched himself like a cord, and withdrew respectfully.

"Madame, for an hour I have been searching for the opportunity of presenting my homage. . . ."

"Monsieur! . . ."

"I am happy beyond words."

"To meet a man of such merits is an honour to me."

"Have I deserved such a compliment?" answered Berthier, and turning to the Chamberlain he shook him by the hand,

and added: "To be at the ball, and not to be presented to you."

"Do I not disturb?" Duroc's voice was heard in the doorway.

"Pray, come in!" invited the Chamberlain. The Marshal of the Court looked sharply round.

"Now I do not wonder at your desertion, Marshal. . . . His Majesty asked after you."

"His Majesty?" repeated Berthier with emotion. "Excuse me, pray . . . I must——"

Duroc looked after the disappearing Berthier.

"It must cost him much! I am very sorry that I deprived him of such charming company."

"You are mistaken," said Pani Walewska quickly. "The Prince of Neufchatel was introduced to me by my husband only a few moments ago."

"But it is a century since you left the ballroom. Have we deserved such a long absence—such an egotism?"

"The egotism was very agreeable to me."

"Did you not tell me that you admired our uniforms so much?"

"I do not forget them. The best witness is the officer present here, with whom I was talking about the army."

Duroc turned round, put his *lorgnon* to his eyes, and said through his teeth—

"Ah! . . . Lieutenant Ornano? Is it so?"

"Yes, sir," affirmed the officer, growing crimson.

"Ah! . . . I thought that you were on duty to-day?"

"No, sir, the seventh company."

"Are you in the first?"

"In the second, sir."

"So-o-o! Madame, will you be kind enough to pass to the ballroom? The *menuet* is on the programme."

"I do not dance."

"But it is M. de Périgord's speciality. We must not deprive him of applause. Then," added Duroc in a low voice, "there in the ballroom; the sun disappeared, and there is a fearful storm raging—darkness covers everything and everybody."

"Permit me, my dearest," said the Chamberlain; "the Princess Dominik Radziwil asked after you several times. You cannot neglect her."

Pani Walewska rose and put her arm unwillingly under her husband's.

Duroc made believe that he had not seen that manœuvre, and, having let the Chamberlain and his wife pass in front of him, nodded to the lieutenant, and said negligently—

"Which Prince commands to-day at headquarters?"

"General-Colonel of the Guard, Marshal Davoust, Prince d'Auerstaedt," reported Ornano.

"Prince d'Auerstaedt! Very well! Find him, and give him this note."

"According to order."

Duroc followed Pani Walewska. The Chamberlain, who noticed Duroc's conversation with Ornano, whispered to his wife—

"It is certain they will send him to Danzig."

Pani Walewska looked at him astonished.

"Whom? Where to?"

The Chamberlain laughed quietly.

"Well . . . that . . . that Prince."

"I do not understand!"

"I tell you he will go! Notice, Bertrand, Montbrun, then Durosnel, and now that . . . what's his name? He deserves it . . . he imagined that Pani Colonna Walewska . . ."

Pani Walewska could not yet understand her husband.

"But what can all this have in common with me?"

"Ha! ha! ha! You do not understand yet. Then talk with one of those madcaps of the general staff, and you shall see the effect. Very well! They deserved it! In the beginning I did not know myself what it meant, only Talleyrand told me! They must be at a respectful distance! They must know . . . even . . ."

The noise of the music drowned his words.

Pani Walewska found herself in her former place, between Princess Jablonowska and Countess Moszynska.

"Ah, *chérie!*" began the Princess in a reproachful tone. "Where have you been hiding? How could you deprive yourself of such a magnificent spectacle? Have you heard? . . . They say that for certain Murat will be our king."

"Murat? . . ."

"Yes, or Davoust! They say that the Emperor's brother, Jerome, would like also, but that the Emperor does not wish it. Well, Murat will represent well, only, as it seems, he is very impetuous and passionate."

"That does not matter!" said Countess Moszynska.

"Of course, but it is very unpleasant for our Pepi, for Murat is from the peasants"—there the Princess bent towards Pani Walewska—"Marie, the Emperor is looking at you through his *lorgnon*."

Pani Walewska raised her head and noticed that the Emperor was directing his *lorgnon* towards her; she blushed, and turned to Countess Moszynska, not paying any attention to the Princess's significantly clearing her throat. But the Princess would not give up, and did not spare her admonitions.

"Marie! Believe my experience! You cannot act in that way. You evidently avoid his looks; you know I wish you well. Look at Anastazy; do you see he has grown pale!"

Pani Walewska rose suddenly and said—

"Is it not the Princess Dominik Radziwil with Jeannette, there to the left?"

"Yes, yes! . . . but, Marie!"

Pani Walewska, with determination marked by the contraction of her eyebrows, passed between uniforms, and, with a feeling of relief, took a seat beside Jeannette on the side of the ball-room, behind the wall of numerous gentlemen.

Jeannette, seeing Pani Walewska, interrupted her animated conversation with a captain of the Dragoon Guards, and greeted the Chamberlain's wife heartily.

"I would like to kiss you, my dearest! I thought you had already forgotten about your Jeannette! *Maman! Voici* Marie!"

"How glad I am," said the Princess Radziwil coolly.

Jeannette began to shout joyfully.

"I am so glad to see you! For an hour I have been looking for an opportunity of talking with you! What trouble I had about that excursion to Jablonna! Victor could not hold his tongue. I did not say a word to anybody, only to *madame*, and she knows how to keep a secret. . . . You are looking charmingly. They are all talking about you! I am so proud of you!

I have quarrelled on your account with a general. Look! with that one to the left, with a bald head. I pity poor Victor! Imagine to yourself—he did not receive an invitation! I was so angry that I intended not to come to the ball. But I am rewarded, for I see you. *L'Empereur* was so absent. Did you notice it? He made three mistakes during the quadrille. I did not think that such a great man did not know how to dance. . . . It is awful what he said to my mother! She is offended. She cannot forget, and she is right, too. Marie, kiss me—here, here—bend over me! Thank you. How much I would like to kiss you! And all through that horrid Emperor! *Ma foi,* he bores me already!"

"But, Jeannette," said Pani Walewska joyfully, when she found an opportunity to say a word; but at this moment the wall of uniforms and evening dresses hiding her began to move aside. Pani Walewska became confused. Jeannette was pleased.

"At last they have understood. Do you see the Emperor standing with Duroc? Did he say anything about the meeting in Jablonna? Did he ask about me?"

"He did not speak at all."

"And he did not ask about me?"

"I do not remember."

"I did not expect that from him. They say he is so *galant.* Well, no matter! Look! I would swear he is looking at us. Let us turn away just to spite him. But why does everybody look at us?"

"You only fancy so," said Pani Walewska in a whisper, having noticed that she was again persecuted by intruding looks.

Jeannette guessed the truth.

"Mary, they are looking at you. . . ."

"You imagine it. . . ."

"Before you came here nobody looked. Do not deny! Ah, how lovely it must be! I envy you!"

"But, Jeannette . . ."

"Let me speak! You are recognised as the most beautiful. Thomas Lubienski told me so, and you know he never lies. I am so proud! If only Victor . . The day after to-morrow

there will be a dinner given by Prince Borghese. Have you already received an invitation? Will you go? Of course you must go! As for me, I do not know. I doubt it. My mother will not be willing to take me. You have not any idea what Victor suffers through her! He intended to run away to Paris, but I persuaded him not to do so. I am very hungry. . . ."

Pani Walewska smiled. Jeannette thought proper to emphasise.

"I promise you it is true! Some sweets were served; but what is that! and then one cannot eat much at a ball, and I am awfully hungry. Joubert sent me my frock so late that I could not eat. Duroc is coming to us. There to the left, with Prince Borghese."

Pani Walewska had hardly time to look in the direction pointed out by Jeannette when she heard behind her Prince Borghese's voice.

"Chamberlain, I count on you for the day after to-morrow."

"It will be my duty, *mon Prince*."

"I hope—Madame also."

Pani Walewska, to whom those words were directed, bent her head, not knowing what to answer. The Prince took her silence for consent.

"I am very much obliged! There will be but a very limited number of guests. The Emperor does not like crowded gatherings."

In the meanwhile, Duroc took hold of the Chamberlain's arm.

"The Emperor asked after you a while ago. . . . You must draw nearer. There is no doubt that he wishes to talk to you."

The Chamberlain stretched himself, bowed slightly, and went with Duroc in the direction where Napoleon was sitting.

The Emperor, leaning in an armchair, looked thoughtfully round the ballroom, hardly listening as the Duke of Bassano bent over him.

From time to time Talleyrand handed him his *lorgnon*, which Napoleon would put for a while to his eyes, look at Pani Walewska, and then return it to M. de Périgord with marks of impatience.

Sometimes the Emperor's look would fall on the crowd of uniforms and evening dresses and draw out from the stupor

some of the dignitaries; and then from Bonaparte's mouth would come out impetuous words, embracing the fate of whole provinces, words which resounded loudly throughout Europe, which were seized assiduously by courtiers trying to find in them indications of new promotions, words noted carefully by history.

The Chamberlain, guided by Duroc, stood in the half-circle surrounding the Emperor, and waited, waited for his look. A long moment passed. Bonaparte did not see the Chamberlain, notwithstanding that the latter stood on tiptoes, and craned his neck over M. de Corvisart, who was standing before him. Moreover, as though to mortify the Chamberlain, the Emperor was talking with Wybicki. The Chamberlain distinctly heard some sentences; he saw not only the quiet and assurance with which Wybicki answered, but also he distinguished in Napoleon's voice a shade of peculiar favour and kindness.

The Chamberlain was devoured by jealousy.

"Write me a list—we shall see," said Napoleon to Wybicki.

The half-circle of uniforms and evening dresses moved.

"Sire!" said Wybicki precipitately, "I am afraid they will accuse me . . ."

"You will write the list," repeated Napoleon with emphasis.

Wybicki bowed. Bonaparte rose from his chair, made a step forward, and having noticed the Chamberlain, frowned. Duroc nodded slightly to Walewski.

The Chamberlain bent respectfully.

"A . . . M. Walewski," said Napoleon between his lips. "Pray, come nearer."

The Chamberlain advanced.

"I did not have the opportunity of making the acquaintance of your wife. You will present her to me at Prince Borghese's dinner-party."

"Sire, I shall be most happy."

"You were Chamberlain?"

"Yes, Sire!"

"H'm! We shall see. It is your third wife."

"Yes, Sire."

"She was not well?"

"Slightly indisposed, Sire."

"Very well. I beg of you to be present with her at all balls and receptions. You have grown-up grandsons; they should enter the army."

"It will be my duty."

"How old are you?"

The Chamberlain grew confused, red spots appeared on his face through powder and paint.

"I . . . I . . . Sire, I am . . . about . . . about sixty . . . that is to say . . . precisely . . ."

"They told me you were eighty," interrupted Bonaparte drily.

"Yes, Sire, about that . . . about . . ." stammered the Chamberlain, losing ground under his feet.

"A fine age—fine!" said the Emperor, and turned to Duroc.

The Marshal of the Court bowed solemnly, nodded to Talleyrand, and turned towards the door, preceding Napoleon.

When the Emperor left, there arose again a free uproar in the ballroom.

The Marshals began to move more boldly. M. de Périgord, surrounded by ladies, rested after the fatigue of Court etiquette, distributing *calembours* and witty words. The gentlemen surrounded Joseph Wybicki, in order to make him talk about what Napoleon had said to him, and to gain the favours of the man who was charged with making a list of the members of the future Government.

Murat, to M. de Flahaut's great disappointment, seated himself by the side of Countess Alexandre Potocka. Prince Borghese was bolder with Countess Thomas Lubienska; even the cautious Berthier permitted himself to chat with Mme. Sobolewska.

Davoust alone did not change his nonchalant attitude, and was talking with the Governor, Gouvion, about the advantages of three-edged bayonets over flat ones, addressing himself from time to time to Prince Joseph Poniatowski.

The orchestra, which played a solemn polonaise at the Emperor's departure, changed now to a mazurka. Groups of young men came forth from the corner of the ballroom. The Frenchmen formed a circle to look at the dance unknown to them—the elder gentlemen began to look towards the door.

Stanislaus Gorayski, standing near, took advantage of the confusion, and having noticed Pani Walewska talking with Jeannette, came to her.

"Ah, Chevalier Gorayski!" exclaimed Jeannette joyfully. "I thought you were not here."

"Could you think that . . .?"

"You do not guess what I mean. I only wonder that you appear so late."

Gorayski smiled sadly, and having looked at Pani Walewska, said with emphasis:

"I could not very well dare to approach."

"I do not approve of your reserve," said Pani Waleswka in an undertone.

Gorayski's eyes shone; his pale face reddened.

"If one could guess sometimes . . ."

"How sentimental you are!" retorted Jeannette, whom Gorayski's sad face amused. "Mary, excuse me, I must go to Kocia Lubienska."

Pani Walewska wished to stop her, but she had already gone.

"What a lovely disposition!" remarked Gorayski, looking at Jeannette.

"You had better say fate—predestination!"

"I do not believe in Ananke."

"Because it never touched you."

"Yes, it did; only my Ananke is not an imaginary being, not a mythical goddess, not a secret wrapped up in mist, but living. . . ."

"Have you heard of Mme. de Staël's new novel?" interrupted Pani Walewska. "The Grand Marshal Duroc told me that it is beautiful! I understand the Emperor is reading it. . . . I would like to get it. . . ."

Gorayski smiled ironically. "I am certain that you will."

"I shall be obliged, for I am already Mme. de Staël's great admirer, because of her *Corinne*."

"I would like to win your gratitude, but I have not got the book, and I do not know where I could get it."

"But you said——?"

"I dared only to suppose that if the Emperor has it, then you also will get it. . . ."

Pani Walewska grew pale; she raised her shapely head proudly, and said in subdued tones: "I thought until now that at least from you I might expect to be respected."

Gorayski dropped his head.

"My words are only a faint echo of that of which the whole town is talking."

Pani Walewska shuddered.

"And you . . . believe in this slander?"

"I listen, I look, and unfortunately I do not find a denial."

"Explain yourself better."

"Is it not better to be silent? I have not the right either to be a judge . . . or . . ."

"You are mistaken! I wish to know with what they reproach me."

"But these are not reproaches! Upon my word, there is not one woman in this room who does not envy you, who is not ready to sacrifice everything in order to be in your place. . . . I beg of you not to think that I am not speaking the truth! It is a success!"

Gorayski, having noticed that Pani Walewska trembled as if shaken by cold, stopped suddenly, and added ceremoniously: "But I am unjustly . . ."

Pani Walewska interrupted him abruptly, making an effort to speak quietly.

"Pan Gorayski, I thought you were a chivalrous man, who, if he ventures to set a woman in a pillory of maliciousness, would make sure that he is right in doing so, or, at least, would not take advantage when there is nobody to defend her!"

"I have spoken without the intention of offending. I thought that it would not be indifferent to you to know . . ."

"I am listening then! What do they say? . . ."

"Nothing precise, besides the details about the meeting prearranged on the road from Pultusk."

"And in which you played an important part!"

"How . . . how is that?"

"Then you have forgotten that you conducted us across the bridge to Praga—you do not remember our excursion with Jeannette and Ossolinski to Jablonna!"

"Then this was the cause?"

"Of such strange behaviour towards me as yours."

"Honestly I did not imagine! I remember well—and now I do not know how I should beg your forgiveness."

"Do not trouble yourself."

"I did not imagine that human malice could go as far as that!"

"Rather your credulity!"

"I am guilty!"

"This avowal speaks in favour of your conscience."

"Madame . . . Mary!"

"Excuse me, sir," said Pani Walewska coolly, and having noticed her husband, rose and went to him.

The Chamberlain was still very irritated after the conversation with the Emperor.

"Are we going home?" his wife asked him.

"Certainly, certainly. Have you noticed—the Emperor was kind—very kind; he inquired—he inquired about many things! Although Dombrowski's partisans are intriguing—and even, who knows, perhaps Malachowski."

Pani Walewska did not answer her husband's suppositions.

The Chamberlain rapped angrily on his snuff-box.

"You do not care about it?"

"On the contrary, but it is late."

"I must see Murat."

"Then you wish to go out last. Look, the Princess Dominik Radziwil is leaving."

The Chamberlain made a movement of impatience.

"You are right! Let us be going! Where there is no Emperor, there is no Walewski."

CHAPTER VIII

THE Chamberlain was very much surprised when, the day after the ball, Baptiste brought him in the morning a letter, telling him that a grenadier was waiting for an answer. The Chamberlain opened the letter with uneasiness, and put on his spectacles. The last night's conversation with the Emperor aroused in him doubts which he was afraid to avow to himself, lest he should pull down the artificial building of hopes, with such a solid foundation, according to him. The Chamberlain tried to persuade himself that the Emperor's emphasis about his age was undoubtedly a proof that the men of his age should have precedence; but this logical deduction spoiled the Chamberlain's humour when he returned home, and was the cause of his quarrelling with his wife.

To the Chamberlain's great surprise the letter was from the Governor of Warsaw, General Gauvion, and contained a short but hearty invitation to a confidential council concerning several public matters, and referred to M. de Périgord's opinions, who said that in such an important question nobody could give better advice than the Chamberlain.

That letter excited the Chamberlain to the highest degree. All doubts tormenting him disappeared. The conference was going to be held at twelve o'clock. Therefore, the Chamberlain, not losing time, answered a few words, and ordered that he should be dressed as quickly as possible.

In an hour and a half the Chamberlain was ready. Baptiste, perspiring and tired, looked at his master with pride, justly considering the Chamberlain's exterior as his masterpiece. The Chamberlain, however, was so excited that he hardly looked into the mirror, swallowed at a draught a cup of *bouillon*, and having given an order to tell his wife that she need not wait

for him for dinner, entered the carriage and was driven to the Governor.

Hardly had the Chamberlain's *coupé* turned into Senatorska Street, when, from the opposite direction, came a green and gold imperial carriage, and stopped before the Walewskis' mansion. Duroc alighted from it. The Walewskis' servants rushed out to tell the Marshal that the Chamberlain was not at home, but the Prince of Friul, not disturbed by this news, told them to announce him to Pani Walewska.

Pani Walewska listened with fright to Baptiste's solemn announcement of the Marshal's visit, not knowing for a moment what to do. Her first impulse was to receive Duroc, and by a few daring answers to break the net of half words and insinuations in which he wanted to involve her, but when she remembered that steel-like pressure of the hand, that burning look of the Emperor's eyes at the ball, a cold shiver ran through her. She felt that any contact with Duroc, any conversation, any explanation might be for her what any movement is to a man being swallowed by quicksands, who sinks deeper the more efforts he makes to save himself.

"Shall I show the Prince to the blue or the grey drawing-room?" asked the valet, unable to understand Pani Walewska's silence.

Pani Walewska gathered strength, and ordered quietly: "Tell the Prince that I am not well, and that I cannot receive him."

Baptiste looked astonished at Pani Walewska, and knowing his master well, he felt that he had a right to make a confidential remark.

"But he is the Grand Marshal of the Court."

"I have given my order."

"If his lordship was at home?"

Pani Walewska showed him the door.

"Your ladyship will excuse me . . . but my lord . . ."

"Go!"

The valet bowed indifferently and disappeared.

Pani Walewska covered her burning face with her hands, and became thoughtful.

Baptiste's loud clearing of the throat woke her up. Pani Walewska turned to the valet.

"Your ladyship . . . a letter!" said the valet loudly.

Pani Walewska put out her hand for the letter lying on a tray, and not even noticing Baptiste's smile, made him a sign to go away. On the envelope of the letter the address was written in a hand difficult to read—

"Madame Marie de Walewska."

Pani Walewska held the letter in her hand for a moment, looked at the seal representing a kind of Gordian knot, and at last decided to open it. From its inside fell out a small piece of paper, on which were a few lines in the same handwriting as the address.

Pani Walewska looked at it a long while before she could read the short contents:—

"I am thinking continuously of you. It seems to me that since yesterday centuries have already passed. A word of answer will tranquillise a man devoured by longing.—N."

Darkness covered Pani Walewska's eyes. Was it possible that those wanton words were written by the man who decided the fate of millions, who, by one stroke of his pen, changed boundaries of countries, built new kingdoms? Then he, that mighty one—he upon whom she looked as upon a god, as the incarnation of unearthly strength, that legendary hero, incomparable genius, commander, who by his Jupiter-like words made Europe tremble, had descended where her sad, quiet life crawled! And why? As for herself, she had long been willing to become his humblest servant, provided she could look at his majesty, to be intoxicated with his grandeur! Humbly and submissively she would have fulfilled his commands, provided he did not make any attempt on her womanhood, provided he spoke to her and looked at her always as a ruler, as an Emperor, as the man chosen from a hundred generations during centuries.

And Pani Walewska was seized by shame for that vulgar avowal. He, great, appeared to her so small, so vulgar, so much like that crowd of hare-brained drawing-room fellows, who tired her with their stupid courtships.

"Your ladyship!" resounded Baptiste's voice near her, "the Grand Marshal of the Court is waiting in his carriage for an answer."

Pani Walewska shivered; the offended pride of the woman made her lovely face crimson; she crumpled the letter violently in her hand, and said threateningly: "There is no answer!"

When the valet, frightened by Pani Walewska's irritation, had disappeared, the Chamberlain's wife felt that her strength almost gave way. She leaned back in the armchair; tears appeared in her eyes; sadness oppressed her heart. The feeling of emptiness and desertion that had followed her ever since the day of her wedding filled her with bitterness. She had nobody to whom she could tell everything, who could give her advice, who could encourage her, who could defend her. She asked so little of life; almost every day she narrowed her requirements more and more. For years her only joy had been her brother. With him she had learned to admire Bonaparte; in his company she was joyful, with him alone she could share her thoughts. Him alone she made the confidant of her longings. But Paul was not there; the continuous wind of war had driven him with the rest of the Polish legions to Lefèbvre's army storming Danzig, and Gorayski remained here. But he! he had known her since she was a child, carried her in his arms, sworn himself her lover, and to-day he persecuted her with insinuations, and accused her even of having ruined her own happiness.

Pani Walewska began to cry.

"You are crying?" said a sonorous man's voice.

Pani Walewska looked through her tears and jumped up from her seat.

Duroc was standing before her.

"Monsieur!"

Under Pani Walewska's magnetising look Duroc dropped his head.

"Pray excuse me."

"Monsieur!" repeated Pani Walewska, breathing with difficulty. "Here!"

"I admit it."

"How did you dare to cross the threshold of my room?"

Duroc became confused.

"Madame, I beg of you to be quieted. I wanted an answer to the letter."

Pani Walewska pointed to the crumpled letter lying on the carpet. "There is your answer! I hope now that you will free me from the visit forced upon me."

Duroc became gloomy; clouds gathered upon his forehead.

"Think over what you are doing; it is not wise! The Emperor has the best intentions!"

Pani Walewska laughed bitterly.

"I do not understand such intentions, and I do not wish to know about them. I am a married woman, which you seem to forget."

"Say rather that you are an unhappy victim."

"I have been taught to respect chains."

"If you say only one word, these chains will be broken!" interrupted Duroc warmly. "Rome will grant you a divorce!"

"I swore to God!"

Duroc tugged impatiently at the plumes of his hat.

"Then let us not go so far—for the present give me one word as an answer."

"You have it."

"You are cruel! or rather you try to be so. And suppose I should beg for it as the greatest favour?"

"I did not know that your high office at Court obliged you to do so many kinds of work."

Duroc grew pale, and said admonishingly—

"I put that to the account of your irritation. The sentiments you aroused in the Emperor are more stable than you think. An answer, be it only a friendly one, will be received with a grateful heart, and it will oblige you to nothing."

Pani Walewska shook her head, and, mastering the trembling that was taking hold of her, she said with force: "I have no answer to give you; I have said it."

Duroc bit his lips.

"Suppose, instead of answering the letter, you would express some wish, some request. His Majesty would be happy if he could do anything for you."

"No, thank you, I have not. . . ."

Duroc laughed sarcastically.

"Then you are a bad wife, bad sister, even a bad Polish patriot."

Pani Walewska leaned on the armchair.

"I receive that accusation, and I do not discuss the motives that dictated it to you."

"But you forget, you do not realise who speaks through my mouth; you do not think that thousands of women in your position would see the realisation of the boldest dreams; that the man who turns towards you commands nations, that at his sign millions bend their knees."

Duroc stopped suddenly, and looked inquiringly at Pani Walewska standing motionless, and he lowered his voice.

"As it seems that you interpret my words badly, you take them too lightheartedly. The interest which the Emperor takes in you is extraordinary, without precedent. Pray believe my experience. Who knows what lot might be in store for you in the immediate future? I repeat—ask, demand; do not have any scruples. Are you still hesitating?"

Pani Walewska dropped her head.

"Cease hesitation, then," again urged Duroc; "and if you do not wish to write, authorise me to give an answer in your name; and then, having thought it over, you can write and send the letter to me."

Pani Walewska suddenly shook off the terror caused by Duroc's words.

"Then be so kind as to ask his Majesty one favour. . . ."

"I am listening. Be so kind as to express it."

"I beg of him, then, in the name of all his good intentions, to relieve me of attentions like to-day's."

Duroc stretched himself proudly.

"You are, Madame, a naughty, capricious child! You may be assured that I shall not give you any more trouble. There will come a time when you will regret to-day's anger, for evidently you have forgotten that the Emperor commands even when he begs!"

Duroc saluted coolly and went out.

Pani Walewska fell into an armchair. She was moved by Duroc's last words, showing her an abyss opening at her feet. Suddenly a thought about escaping from the net which was entangling her aroused her energy. She rang for the servant, and ordered her boxes to be packed at once.

The servants, wondering, began to fulfil her orders, trying by timid remarks to find out from her what that sudden change meant, in face of Baptiste's assurance that they would not go to Walewice before the Emperor's departure. But Pani Walewska did not give any elucidation, did not let any of the servants idle, helping them herself, gaining courage and energy every time a box or a valise was ready. Nothing could frighten her now—neither a meeting with her husband, nor his undoubted opposition, nor his anger at her arbitrariness. Pani Walewska understood one thing—that she must run away; that she must hide from the peril threatening her; that this flight was the only remedy that would save her.

Amid this disorder, this feverish packing of heaps of things, this opening of wardrobes and emptying of drawers, Princess Jablonowska found her sister-in-law.

The Princess's astonishment had no limits.

"Marie, what means this disorder? Boxes! What for! I met Anastazy an hour ago. He was driving to Gauvion. He did not say anything of your going away."

"I return to Walewice."

"To Walewice!" repeated the Princess, astonished in the highest degree.

"To-day; without fail, to-day!"

The Princess looked inquisitively at her sister's feverish face.

"Such a sudden decision! But you are invited by Prince Borghese for to-morrow."

"Anastazy can remain."

The Princess took Pani Walewska by the hand, and conducted her to another room.

"You are hiding something from me. You do not have confidence in me, and you do not imagine how much you interest me."

"I believe you! I believe you!" answered Pani Walewska; "but I must go immediately! There is no power that could stop me. Anastazy can . . but I do not want the Court or your society. Leave me! forget me! cease to take any interest in me! I wish to be alone—absolutely alone!"

Pani Walewska wished to speak further, but the words stuck in her throat.

The Princess became sincerely sorrowful.

"*Ma chère!* You know I am ready to do anything for you! But what has happened? I cannot find a reason! Is it Anastazy? You must forgive him many things. I understand your position. He must be *insupportable!* . . . It is old age, between ourselves. One must have philosophy, and not care about everything . . . it is unwise. To leave! But what will the people say? Anetka is only waiting to spread some slander about you, especially after last night's incident with Gorayski! I tell you, I was obliged to use all my persuasive powers to prove to Princess Radziwil that this horrible fight between him and Herceau was not caused by you."

"Fight with Herceau?"

"Well, yes," affirmed the Princess sadly. "They fought a duel, and Gorayski is wounded. . . . Herceau, notwithstanding everything, has some influence with the Prince of Berg, and even with Marshal Berthier. It is impossible to guess what will come of all this. I tremble at the thought that Anastazy might learn about it—he is so sensitive. . . ."

"Gorayski is wounded?" asked Pani Walewska hesitatingly.

"*Ma foi!* They called in Dr. Wojcicki. They sent word to Gorayski's mother. Herceau was too hard upon him. He ought to have forgiven the young man. I shall tell him so. Therefore you see that this sudden departure would confirm the suppositions."

"I do not know anything about it. I did not give any reasons."

"My dear child, you do not need to tell me. . . . But at the first glance, seeing you among your boxes, unwillingly I thought of Gorayski."

Pani Walewska was rubbing her smooth forehead uneasily, in vain searching for a connection between the news of the duel and Duroc's visit.

The Princess, on her side, did not cease either her questioning or her remonstrances; she spoke indulgently, cautiously trying to find the reason why her sister-in-law wished so suddenly to go away.

Pani Walewska was unmoved. The Princess used her last cartridge.

"If you trifle with the opinion of society, if you are in-

different to your husband's plans, then at least remember your family. Why should poor Ksawery suffer from your bad humour or unjustified bitterness? In what way is the Imperial Court guilty, for which the Walewskis . . .?"

Pani Walewska jumped from her seat.

"Imperial Court! If you loved me, if you cared for the family, and were really so penetrating as you say, then you should have been the first to bid me go away."

"*Mais,* Marie!"

"Yes, you, first."

"Permit me to explain to you. Ksawery's plans in regard to the Princess Radziwil may be ruined, for the Princess is very particular. Already to-day she was sour, and should you go away . . ."

"Princess, you are mistaken!"

"*Chérie,* do not give me my title. I cannot guess of what mistake you are talking."

Pani Walewska, in answer, rushed to her dressing-room and returned with the crumpled letter.

"Here is my answer! Read and learn what I should fear before all things."

The Princess took the letter with an indulgent smile, glanced at it, and became confused.

"Permit me, my dear child. 'N!' Who is 'N'? Is it M. de Noailles? Undoubtedly it is he. I recognise his style. Unbearable! He does not leave any lady in peace! I shall tell him. Then it is this letter that excited you so much?"

Pani Walewska nodded affirmatively; the Princess laughed heartily.

"This letter! Ha! ha! But, my dear child, you do not know our world! A proof of frolicsome homage, innocent levity—an occasion for joking. You are beautiful enough to receive a score of similar declarations every day. Then M. de Noailles has already found you! He has good taste, but only yesterday he was courting Anetka."

"If the question were about M. de Noailles, I should know myself how to give him a good lesson."

The Princess looked attentively at Pani Walewska with her dark, uneasy eyes.

"Then you say that the 'N' does not mean . . ."

"The letter was brought to me by the Grand Marshal of the Court."

"Duroc?" cried the Princess with emotion. "Is it possible? Then you suppose that the letter 'N' . . .?"

"Duroc's words put an end to all my doubts."

The Princess was so moved by this news that she could not speak. Only after a long silence she sighed; then she took Pani Walewska delicately by the hand and clasped her to her bosom.

Pani Walewska replied to this evident proof of sympathy by tears.

"*Chère Marie!* Excuse me, forgive me—it must hurt! Ah! how could I suppose? It is true that there was some ground for supposition, but I never thought it would come so soon! Permit me to kiss you."

Pani Walewska responded heartily to the Princess's loud kisses, feeling, in the meanwhile, how unjust she had been to her husband's sister, how unfounded was her prejudice against her.

In the meanwhile, the Princess rubbed her eyes with a handkerchief, cleared her throat solemnly, and said, looking at the letter—

"It is a formal declaration! You should keep it—it may be very valuable."

Pani Walewska opened her eyes, which were full of tears, wide.

The Princess hastened to explain.

"You must keep this letter; believe my experience! I knew Pani Grabowska as I know you; my aunt was Aurora Königsmark's friend."

"But permit me . . ."

"My dear! allow me to explain everything to you. Be frank; I think you should trust me. Not only because of Anastazy I wish you well. I always loved your family, and I well remember your late father. Speak, speak, my dear! tell me how it was—from the beginning! At the ball yesterday I noticed . . but even M. de Périgord doubted. . . ."

Pani Walewska, in a trembling voice, began to relate all the

details of the first meeting with the Emperor, and then the conversation with Duroc, the incident of the bouquet, and at last the Marshal's violent invasion of her room.

The Chamberlain's wife spoke with feeling, and did not notice either the Princess's smiles nor the incredulous movement of her head nor the expression of indulgent surprise around her mouth.

Pani Walewska stopped from time to time; then again tormented by the sentiments whirling in her, spoke with bitterness, complaining of her fate, of her spoiled youth, of human malice persecuting her, of the world of which she was always afraid, and from which she wished to run away.

The Princess did not interrupt Pani Walewska; she allowed her to say everything, to shake off the burden of thoughts crowding in her head, and only when Pani Walewska became silent, searching in the Princess's face for sympathy, the latter smiled still more sweetly, kissed her sister-in-law still more loudly, and said in a tone of motherly remark—

"How simple you are! how noble! I admire you, my dear child! I love you a hundred times more, seeing you so pure! Permit me to kiss you; only, to-day, you were too impetuous. You might have answered, especially when the Marshal asked you to express your wish. What a pity you did not ask for time to think things over. You might have asked my advice. You know how much Anastazy needs the Court for his plans."

Pani Walewska grew pale.

"But he cannot use this means!"

"Child, child, and once more child! you do not know life! *Vraiment, tu est très difficile!* I do not know how to explain to you! H'm! Have you confidence in me? Do you believe that I should like to see Anastazy happy? Then give up the plan of your departure! Remain!"

"Then am I going to expose myself to insults such as to-day's?"

"Can homage paid to a woman by a most powerful Emperor be called an insult?"

"I cannot call such a letter as this homage."

The Princess became sorrowful.

"*Chère*, do not look on things from the point of view of your

chambermaids in Walewice. There are superior reasons, in the presence of which you should give up your sublime intentions even towards Anastazy. I will tell you more: he himself would not permit that you should guide yourself by such small considerations. You must apply another measure. *Chère Marie,* I cannot explain to you all that at once. Have confidence in me. Do not be irritated at Duroc. The Emperor wished to express to you his benevolence—there is nothing in that. Everything depends on your tact. Then, I will take care of you—be sure that I shall know how to protect you in case of need. Only give up the absurd idea of going away."

"But first of all I will tell everything to Anastazy—he shall decide!"

The Princess shook her hands in despair.

"What nonsense! Without any reason you wish to disturb his peace; and what for? If you arouse apprehensions in him, you will in the meanwhile fill him with bitterness and aversion towards the Court. Anastazy is impetuous; he might say some hard words and offend his Majesty. Do you understand his Majesty? Marie, I very well understand your noble scruples, but at the same time I am afraid for Anastazy, for the whole family, especially after that incident with Herceau."

"I did not give any cause for it."

"I am persuaded, but you were careless. Herceau was courting you. Gorayski evidently has some old illusions, and the thing was done. . . . The only advice—do not change anything; be indifferent, and do not attract attention. It will, it must pass if you do not go away."

"Anastazy will decide about that!"

"But he does not wish to return to Walewice."

"Because he does not know anything. I shall tell him at once."

The Princess was frightened.

"Marie, think it over! Although he is my brother, but . . . but . . . I am not blind. He is ill, irritable; you will expose yourself to his reproaches; you will arouse in him . . ."

"It may be, but I have no other way."

"Then permit me! Yes, I will have a talk with him; I will explain to him. He trusts me! You cannot do it! He will listen to me!"

Pani Walewska hesitated to accept this unexpected help.

The Princess insisted more and more energetically, depicting to Pani Walewska all the perils of a dispute with an old, ill, and impetuous husband.

"Anastazy may suspect you; he may not only take you away, but shut you up in some convent. At his age the man is unmanageable! He would not let you speak; he would condemn you before you would be able to explain everything to him!"

Pani Walewska dropped her head.

The Princess spoke the truth. The Chamberlain's custom was to refuse to listen to his wife; from her one word he would often spin out very improbable deductions; he judged her before listening to her; he sentenced her, not allowing her to defend herself.

Princess Jablonowska understood her power over the Chamberlain's wife, and when the latter still was not willing to consent to the Princess's speaking on her behalf, she rang for the servant, and having learned that the Chamberlain had just returned home, she rose quickly and went to her brother's apartment.

Pani Walewska had not even the courage to ask the Princess where she was going, nor strength to stop her. The thought of a conversation with her husband frightened her. In her ears resounded the Chamberlain's sarcastic laughter, his hoarse voice and drawling snuffling. She felt the malicious look of his small glassy eyes; she saw red spots coming out on his cheeks and forehead from beneath a layer of powder, and she heard streams of insulting, humiliating reproaches, in which he would speak of every piece of bread eaten by her family in his house, every penny given to keep the rest of the Kiernosia estates, and would insist that he, a decrepit old man, exhausted by fast living, ill, half dead, had conferred on her a favour by stooping down to her beauty, youth, pure thoughts, and immaculate sentiments, and would reproach her with being unable to appreciate the happiness to be found in the sickly ardour of a drawing-room dandy of forty years ago; would complain because where the Chamberlain felt a dangerous draught she enjoyed the breath of the fresh wind;

because what tired him, did not have the same effect on his young wife; because she was not as apathetic as he was; because her heart throbbed with pure sympathy for every noble or great deed; because she was healthy, and could not even comprehend that awfully persistent headache which so often visited her husband.

Therefore, when after a long while Pani Walewska heard the rustling of a silk frock, and then the sound of her husband's cough, she was so frightened that she could not raise her eyes, she was afraid to look at the Princess lest she might read in her face the announcement of that storm which she expected for certain.

The Princess, in the meanwhile, having guessed her sister-in-law's uneasiness, adroitly left the Chamberlain behind, and coming swiftly to Pani Walewska, kissed her effusively, and whispered—

"All over, and very satisfactorily! Do not say anything, do not explain anything! Anastazy was moved . . . very much moved. . . ."

Pani Walewska could not dominate her surprise.

"Then he consented to go away?"

"Child! he is coming; leave that to him and to me."

The Chamberlain's wife had not time to answer; her husband was already before her, smiling at her as he only did when he was very satisfied.

"Well, there was some unnecessary disorder in the house? What? . . ."

"*Elle est si nerveuse!*" said the Princess.

The Chamberlain moved his head kindly.

"Nothing has come of that; I have given orders to unpack the boxes. It was very well, very well that you sent the Princess to me. I am awfully pleased. I find in that a proof of commonsense and affection! Very well!"

Pani Walewska looked at her husband with gratitude. Almost never before had he spoken so kindly to her.

The Princess smiled imperceptibly, and winked at Pani Walewska.

"I appreciate that," concluded the Chamberlain solemnly. "I am very agreeably *frappé*."

"I did not expect anything else from Marie!" said the Princess triumphantly.

"Certainly, certainly! one cannot wish for anything better."

"I have always been telling you so."

The Chamberlain did not understand what the Princess had been telling him, but, as he was in good humour, he nodded affirmatively, and, wishing to attribute to himself some merit in the matter, said pompously: "If I had not seen that she would be worthy of Colonna Walewski, I should never have married her!"

"Then we must think about the dress for to-morrow's dinner party."

"The blue dress with gold stars!" decided the Chamberlain.

Pani Walewska could not conceal her terror. "What, then, after all that happened, we are going to Prince Borghese's?"

"Undoubtedly! we are invited; we are among the few selected guests. It is impossible to refuse; and then, nothing extraordinary has happened. The partisans of the Potockis and the Dombrowskis will gnash their teeth. Gauvion asked me a great many questions to-day! The temporary Government will be dismissed any day! To-morrow, indeed, some important steps will be taken."

"Anastazy is right," rejoined the Princess precipitately. "You must be present."

"But suppose Duroc again? . . ." stammered Pani Walewska.

"Be calm . . . do not take things so seriously. . . ."

"Neither take to yourself that which is addressed to somebody else!" added the Chamberlain gravely. "With time you will learn the Court's subterfuges. And now . . ."

"Remember that we also remember you!" ended the Princess solemnly.

Pani Walewska looked hesitatingly at her sister-in-law, and asked: "Does Anastazy know everything?"

"Naturally."

"About the letter, too?"

The Princess laughed heartily.

"What a child she is still! I repeated word for word. . . . Pray, Anastazy, look how becoming that uncertainty is to her. *Très bien!* . . ."

The Chamberlain rapped his snuff-box and half closed his eyes.

"Countess de Vauban!" declared Baptiste's voice suddenly.

The Chamberlain turned to his sister.

"I said that the Poniatowskis are cringing. What? H'm . . ."

"We must receive . . ."

Pani Walewska made an impatient movement.

"I would prefer to avoid this visit."

"Why?"

"I am not well. . . ."

"Marie! You do not know Vauban."

"H'm . . . perhaps it would be better not to receive!" rejoined the Chamberlain suddenly. "Let them know . . ."

The Princess shrugged her shoulders.

"Then you do not know that between her and Pepi everything is over? Entirely. . . . They preserve appearances, and both are only seeking how to break altogether! She was always well disposed towards us. . . ."

"That may be, but as Marie is not disposed . . ." interfered the Chamberlain.

"Then permit me to receive her instead of Marie. One cannot act otherwise with Vauban. You do not know her, you do not appreciate her merits. . . . One cannot slight her. . . . Therefore I am going. . . . Show the Countess into the blue drawing-room."

Baptiste bowed and went out. The Princess followed him.

The Chamberlain having remained with his wife, made a grimace, and, balancing himself on his heels, said: "I do not know what she sees in that withered Vauban! Apparently all is over! We know that Poniatowski has broken with her several times! And now—well, it is clear, he is afraid of the shadow of the Bourbons! . . ."

"Bourbons?" repeated Pani Walewska, trying to understand her husband.

"Yes . . . French emigration! Vauban is and was the Prince de Ligny's tale-bearer. If he were to act . . . in a word, an interrupted chain reaching Louis! Ho! ho! Well, and Pepi! Ha! ha! Machiavelli! and a good one too!"

"Prince Joseph?"

The Chamberlain puffed up his lips.

"Prince Joseph! Simply Poniatowski! Do you think that the late King had not enough bother with him? He was intriguing continually! I know something about it! Well, he wished to be powerful, but there were some people who did not allow it. Count Szczensny Potocki warned the King. And not he alone, there was some one else!"

The Chamberlain cleared his throat significantly.

"Pepi was always intriguing," continued the Chamberlain, "and he wishes to do the same now, but he will not succeed. The Emperor knows whom he should trust, and if he does not know then there is some one who will warn him. They think that their time has come, but they are mistaken! Colonna Walewski is still living; Colonna Walewski will dwarf their intrigues!"

"But there is nothing of importance going on."

The Chamberlain trembled with indignation at that modest remark.

"Yes, for you, for you, there is only a reception in the Castle, a ball at Talleyrand's, a dinner at Prince Borghese's, and then a bouquet from Duroc, and a quadrille with the Emperor. . . . What does not fall on your head, you do not see. Poniatowski wishes to push himself to the front. He sends the Countess to spy . . . and you . . ."

"I did not wish to receive her." Pani Walewska tried to justify herself.

"You did not wish! . . . Fine policy! Country statesmanship! Another woman would catch the adversaries' plans, discover plots, penetrate into their most secret thoughts, and you . . . nothing! You are only afraid that the Emperor may not fall in love with you. You have dreamed about the fairy tale, about Cinderella! Nonsense! No judgment! no co-operation! Useless . . . useless trouble!"

The Chamberlain made a contemptuous movement with his hand, and went out mumbling.

Pani Walewska breathed freely. The reproaches made by her husband were not new ones. She had become accustomed to them, but never before had she felt so hurt as to-day.

Her husband's views never seemed so shallow to her as to-day, and the boldness of his accusations, made of other people,

so impudent. For what meant his continual threatening and boasting? Why did he trifle with her fears? Why did he, her husband, try to refer that pursuit begun by the Marshal of the Court, and perhaps not by him alone, to the desire of winning him to the Emperor?

Was it possible that she did not understand Duroc's intentions and the looks addressed to her at the ball? Could it be that she owed everything, from the never-to-be-forgotten words pronounced at the meeting at Jablonna to the Grand Marshal's last appeal, to her husband's name, to the illustriousness of his family? Was she really mistaken? Was her husband right? But suppose he wished to use her influence?

Pani Walewska wanted to shake off that insulting suspicion, but the thought returned obstinately, and was strengthened by the recollection of his ideas of Court life, and the stories relating to the romantic life of Cosel, Orzelska, Koenigsmark, and Grabowska.

The Chamberlain's wife looked into the mirror and became ashamed of her own imagination. She became ashamed of the pride which taught her to despise the title of favourite, of the honesty which could not bear duplicity, of her faith in the sanctity of marriage, of the sincere modesty which did not permit her to see either her own beauty nor the charm of her eyes, nor the fascination of her smile.

Notwithstanding all that, the crumpled letter and the Marshal's assurance did not cease tormenting her, arousing her resentment against her husband, her sister-in-law, and all around her, who, notwithstanding her readiness to escape the net thrown over her, notwithstanding her desire to escape even the suspicion of the Emperor's favours, notwithstanding her wish to hide from the insulting way of gaining the husband through his wife, weakened her vigilance and forced her to remain and face the peril.

Pani Walewska's grievance grew into an unpleasant amazement, and hurt her self-esteem.

The Chamberlain's wife did not like her husband, but she had grown accustomed to him, and received all his caprices with submission. And although the Chamberlain's despotism was not easy to bear, it nevertheless showed an old man's love,

the continual care, the cupidity of an avaricious man who trembled for his treasure and was awfully jealous over it.

Up to a short time before, Pani Walewska was obliged to be very careful, for any word, any question, caused an avalanche of suspicion and reproaches.

And now, when she almost asked her husband for protection, when she herself warned him about the peril, when she wished to escape that world in which every word, every look, every bow of the men, were snares for the woman, he trifles with her warnings; he does not show even that egotistical love; he even considers her as not worthy of jealousy.

The Princess's entrance interrupted those thoughts. The Chamberlain's wife looked at the Chamberlain's sister with displeasure. The Princess seemed to be very sorry.

"Marie! I importune you! I interrupt your moment of quiet! And you need it so much! so much!"

"It is true," answered Pani Walewska drily.

"Do you see how I understand you? . . . but Vauban . . . begs that you will not refuse her the pleasure of seeing you! She is very devoted to you!"

The Princess half closed her eyes as if thereby to emphasise Mme. de Vauban's devotion.

"But, if I remember well, I have only seen her twice in my life, and I do not know if we have exchanged half a dozen words."

The Princess sighed.

"My dear child, how superficially you take everything! You should hear with what enthusiasm Vauban spoke of you! She did not have an opportunity, but she always felt with you. Then you do not believe in the sympathy of hearts?"

Pani Walewska did not know what to answer to that.

"It may be, although . . . ."

"You must receive her; you ought to. In spite of everything she has a splendid past on her side! They gossip about her, but nobody can deny that she is a woman of the world, that she has the best and the most refined manners, that she comes of an excellent family. She comes first to you; she disregards etiquette, she who only sends cards to ladies of the best families in return to their visits. Even if . . . then you

should not show yourself to be ungrateful. I told her that you are not well. She was very sorry; she almost had tears in her eyes."

"I do not know how I deserved . . ."

"*Chère Marie,* do this for me! You have not the right to reply to such hearty sympathy by a commonplace phrase. Receive her; it is your duty to receive her!"

"But even Anastazy . . ."

"He is momentarily prejudiced, and undoubtedly he will change his opinion. Vauban did not like him—ah! it is very unpleasant to admit—but she was right. We may be frank with each other. One cannot consider your marriage as well matched. Up to now Vauban was angry with Anastazy because of that. And, if I do not share her opinion, it is because egotism does not permit me to think that you are a stranger, that you do not belong to our family. It seemed to me that even if those bonds did not exist, even then our relationship would not be changed, would not be less hearty, less sympathetic."

Here the Princess kissed Pani Walewska noisily on the forehead, and before the latter could answer she rang for the servant.

"Princess . . ."

"Nothing, nothing; leave that to me," answered the Princess, precipitately, and, perceiving the chambermaid at the door, she ordered: "Show the Countess in here."

The Chamberlain's wife became sorrowful.

"Is it proper? If it is absolutely necessary I will go to the drawing-room."

"No, no! On the contrary! You will please the Countess; it will be a proof that you welcome her heartily by setting aside etiquette. . . . Permit me . . . here is the Countess. . . ."

Pani Walewska turned her head towards the door, at which stood Mme. de Vauban, and made a few steps forward, wishing to greet the new-comer; but the latter prevented her, and, rushing with long steps, stretched her arms to Pani Walewska. The Chamberlain's wife had not time even to say a word before Mme. de Vauban's hands began to press hers, and the Countess's lips began to kiss Pani Walewska's face.

"I am awfully thankful! Pray, believe me! I have long

looked for an opportunity!" whispered Mme. de Vauban, continuing her kisses and huggings.

"I also!" answered Pani Walewska mechanically, dazed both by the perfume emanating from Mme. de Vauban and by the outburst of unexpected cordiality.

Here the Princess deemed it proper to take out her fine handkerchief, and to move it from her nose to her eyes, and then to sigh with relief.

"How happy I am!"

"Be seated!" said Pani Walewska, ridding herself at last of Mme. de Vauban's embrace.

The Countess took Pani Walewska by the hand, and conducted her to a sofa near the window.

"Here we shall be comfortable."

The Princess was moved.

"How glad I am! I am going to leave you, for I do not wish to be in your way! I am sure you have many things to tell each other."

The Chamberlain's wife looked at her sister-in-law with despair, trying to make her understand that her presence would facilitate the conversation with Mme. de Vauban, but Princess Jablonowska sent a kiss, winked significantly at the Countess, and went out.

Pani Walewska, being left with Mme. de Vauban alone, was sincerely embarrassed, not knowing how to begin the conversation, or what to talk to her about. All the stories she had heard about Mme. de Vauban's unbridled life came to the Chamberlain's wife's mind, and the thought that she was in the presence of a woman who had long been an oracle of elegance, fashion, and refinement, intimidated her. Moreover, Pani Walewska felt Mme. de Vauban's inquisitive, intruding, assured look, which magnetised and made her powerless.

Mme. de Vauban, however, hastened to break the silence. She drew nearer to Pani Walewska, put her arm delicately round the waist of the Chamberlain's wife, and said gently: "Pray raise your little head."

Pani Walewska hesitatingly fulfilled the Countess's wish.

Mme. de Vauban fell into admiration mingled with a shade of commiseration.

"What beautiful eyes! What a complexion! Permit me to kiss you! You have no idea how much I care about your fate, how well I understand every one of your thoughts. Perhaps it seems to you strange that I should fall suddenly into such a familiarity . . . but I always guide myself by presentiments. Permit me to express myself in French. I love your language, but I do not know it as I should like to. . . ."

"Oh, pray . . ."

"What a charm! What simplicity in every word! One must not only love you, but also admire you! Then one must look into your heart. O Lord! Do I not see what is going on in your noble heart? Do I not guess how deserted it is, how longing for sympathy?"

Pani Walewska dropped her head; the Countess's words entered directly into her heart, and the shade of sympathy trembling in Mme. de Vauban's voice sounded attractive; only the perfumes dazed her, only the Countess's hand, holding her hand, seemed very cold.

Mme. de Vauban, after a short pause, leaned to Pani Walewska's ear and whispered—

"I have a greeting for you from some one! Chevalier de Gorayski."

"Thank you!"

"He is better, although the wound is a dangerous one."

"Then it is true what they said, that yesterday . . ."

"Quite true. He spent a very bad night. A sword-thrust . . . he suffers very much . . . one does not know how all that will end. . . ."

"Is the wound so dangerous?"

"In the first place the wound, and then mixing in the affair of the field gendarmery; and besides, the Emperor's name was mentioned several times during the fray. . . . One may fear serious responsibilities. Gorayski was not prudent. Herceau passionate as usual."

"Poor Gorayski!"

Mme. de Vauban pressed Pani Walewska's hand.

"How painful!"

"Undoubtedly . if he had to suffer. . . ."

"No, one cannot allow that! To-day I am going to beg the

Prince . . . Pepi must find out the truth; the Prince of Berg is fond of him, or, if necessary, he will go to the Emperor himself. . . . We shall do everything. One must protect him . , it is our duty."

Pani Walewska made a movement of uneasiness.

"Excuse me, but I do not understand."

"So much the better," answered Mme. de Vauban, with animation. "You must not expose yourself . . . you ought not! Leave Gorayski to me; I shall do everything in my power. . . . One must act quickly! He loves you very much."

Pani Walewska blushed.

"Excuse me for having touched such a delicate point."

"You are mistaken—I am Gorayski's friend."

"But I understand all that. You knew each other from childhood; you found out when it was too late. . . . You have been very strong; he is crushed by pain; jealousy devours him; he suffers because you are not happy, because at the price of such great sacrifices you have not purchased even quiet for yourself. He suffers doubly."

"I did not give him any reason."

"I am sure of it; it is difficult, however, not to appreciate such an attachment, especially in surroundings which understand us so little, so little; it comprehends not our desires, thoughts, longings. . . . I often thought of you, I often wondered. The emptiness into which you were pushed would break the strongest woman. What a strength of mind you must have!"

"But what threatens Gorayski?" asked Pani Walewska, whom Mme. de Vauban's veiled words began to irritate.

The Countess moved her head sadly.

"Truly, I do not know what to say. There was a quarrel. Herceau saw a rival in Gorayski, and he did not see the third person. Some words offensive to his Majesty were spoken. It is true that the worth of such a majesty may be questioned. . . . Herceau has disappeared. Gorayski, wounded, could not run away; the whole responsibility will fall on him! Bonaparte does not forgive easily!"

"Then if that is the case, there is a great mistake. I can assure you that the Emperor has not a greater admirer than Gorayski. He is devoted to him body and soul; he was the

first to join the guard of honour; he persuaded the young men to follow his example."

Mme. de Vauban smiled indulgently.

"It is true, it was so yesterday! It was so undoubtedly. For could he imagine that that admired conqueror, great commander, powerful usurper, could think of taking away his only treasure, the heart of the woman for whom he had sacrificed so much? . . ."

"Madame, I do not understand all that."

"Naturally. Is a beautiful and pure flower conscious of its charm? Does a star know the strength of its light? All admire it, all bend their knees; the troubadours sing their songs, the poets tune their lutes, the knights put on their armour and fight, and she shines majestically, quiet for ever, unconscious of it all!"

"A very beautiful comparison, but I cannot guess . . ."

Mme. de Vauban bent over Pani Walewska, pressed her hand more closely, and said with emphasis: "Then you do not even guess the sentiment you have aroused in Napoleon?"

The Chamberlain's wife grew pale, but not losing her self-control, made a negative movement with her head. The Countess looked at her coolly.

"I was sure of it! Well, then, the Emperor loves you madly! He loves you as a man does who has not much time for love. He thinks of you constantly; he repeats your name continually! He torments Duroc; he leaves Corvisart no peace. He, who until now trampled on everything, who was accustomed to break every obstacle, to overthrow every State, he is humble; perhaps . . . he would not hesitate to give you half of his life, to sacrifice his power, if he alone could kneel at your feet and look into your eyes! . . ."

"Why do you speak in that way to me?" asked Pani Walewska in a whisper.

"Because I wish to show you the terrible peril hanging over Gorayski's head. I wish to help you in this difficult moment of your life! Ah! you do not need either to justify yourself or explain anything to me. I guess your painful surprise, your hurt ambition, and the loveliness which you feel now more keenly than ever! Do not deny it. I know how the

Prince of Friul treated you! It was shameful of him! The only thing that justified him is infatuation! To people like him, the name of Napoleon is sufficient to make them forget all considerations, all divine and human laws, to make them wonder that anyone dares to oppose any scruples, any ideas, any principles to Bonaparte. Yes, he acted in good faith, and he did not suppose that he would be justly defeated; he did not foresee that he would be an unsuccessful messenger. Dear Mary!—permit me to call you by your name—I learned all this by accident! I will tell you that the whole Court is stirred up; they are trying to find some means to persuade you how unwise you are. They are searching for a way; they would like to win you; they tremble that their master may frown, that he may scold them, because they cannot be useful to him in this matter. Just imagine, they came to me! Why should I conceal it? A while since Duroc called on me; he begged me, he besought me to use my influence with you! Blind man! Would I undertake such a humiliating rôle! I could hardly get rid of the bore! But what is the most amusing is that the Marshal almost by force persuaded me to take a letter for you! Here it is! You guess from whom it is?"

"Pray, return it to the Marshal."

Mme. de Vauban laughed.

"Ah! what for? You can easily make believe . . . that you do not understand its contents! It is true that I never supposed that the *citoyen* Bonaparte was so sentimental! Only listen: 'Madame,—Perchance this third letter may produce more effect. Have I deserved to be treated thus? It is not I, but you that came to me, and having taken my heart, you run away, you hide yourself, you avoid me! Have you a right to refuse me that morsel of happiness which would be given to me if you answered but one word?' Very well written, is it not?"

Pani Walewska was tearing her handkerchief nervously.

Mme. de Vauban became grave.

"Pray, do not be angry with me for an involuntary joke! I perfectly understand that this latter has a very serious side! It is an aggression! It is true that the Emperor is justified, for you stood first in his way. But has he any right to ask you to sacrifice yourself even because of that?"

The Chamberlain's wife trembled.

"Did you come here to torment me?—to disturb the rest of my peace?"

Mme. de Vauban closed Pani Walewska's mouth with a noisy kiss.

"Noble, worthy, good, and beautiful!" she said enthusiastically. "I wanted to have you always so. I imagined you so! My presentiments did not deceive me! You alone are able to think and to act in this way! I am so proud and happy at it! In our times it is an unusual phenomenon, known only from tales and novels! Excuse my boldness! I permitted myself to be carried away by a malicious suspicion; I dared to test you! That letter was really written by the Emperor, but your principles are stronger, higher than his crown, than his victorious eagles! Command—I can do much; I will strain all my forces to help you!"

In Mme. de Vauban's words there was such warmth and such sincerity that Pani Walewska was moved; the tears shone in her eyes. It was long since anybody had spoken to her with so much heart.

"You are so good! I would like to justify myself. . . ."

"You have done so already. Yes, dear Mary, it is not only to-day that you have begun to fight—your heart and your duty have long struggled; any woman in your place would have found many excuses to surrender. Even should you weaken now, it would not lessen your great qualities. The situation is a very difficult one, but we shall succeed, provided we act quietly and with prudence; we shall find the means. . . ."

"I would like to leave, to escape, but they will not allow it!" complained Pani Walewska, who could not control herself any longer.

"And it is well that you should remain. Remember that for him distance does not exist. . . ."

"Then you suppose . . . ?" asked Pani Walewska, who remembered Duroc's words.

"Everything! From him one may expect the worst. . . . However, here in Warsaw, in case of need, you will undoubtedly find support, help; here he must count with public opinion. Only you must not lose courage."

"Give me advice; what shall I do in order to avoid his attacks? I have been trying in vain for several days to find some means. . . . You should have heard the Marshal to-day. . . . How sorry I am for that stupid curiosity which made me go to Jablonna; but could I think . . . The Emperor aroused enthusiasm in me—nothing else! I had a talk with the Princess; she told my husband all about it. I thought that they would allow me to withdraw, but they do not; they simply try to persuade me that I am mistaken. You are the first person who tells me that my apprehensions are not groundless. . . . Yes, I am not mistaken. . . . I wish I were. . . . Because I would not . . . for the greatest favours, for any riches, for anything in this world. . . ."

Pani Walewska laughed nervously.

"What am I talking about? But I am not accustomed to your world. . . . I am afraid of all of you. . . ."

"But, dear child—that world is not so frightful—you will see. . . ."

Mme. de Vauban kissed Pani Walewska again.

"What ideas, what sad thoughts! . . . A little courage, and your life will be strewn with roses, which are due to your beauty. . . ."

"What are you aiming at?"

"Ah, at nothing! simply a presentiment that fate cannot be so cruel for you always. . . ."

"I do not expect anything from it. If only it had such surprises in store for me. . . ."

"Do you wish to avoid them? Then listen to me."

CHAPTER IX

THE conversation with Madame de Vauban gave courage to Pani Walewska. She told the Countess about all her apprehensions, and she found indulgence and appreciation; she threw away the burden of thoughts that were crowding upon her, and now she looked quietly into the future.

Madame de Vauban kept her promises; she protected Pani Walewska so well, that, thanks to the Countess's influence, the Chamberlain's wife was at once freed from her husband's tiresome control and the Princess's intruding remarks. The Chamberlain, who until now had disliked Madame de Vauban very much, and accused her of intriguing for the Poniatowskis, suspecting her, not without reason, of sympathy with the Bourbons, did not even try to resist the Countess's absolute rule, and her rule was so sudden that Pani Walewska herself, the same day, could not imagine how she could live without the good-hearted and indulgent Countess.

Madame de Vauban would not leave the Chamberlain's wife even for a moment, and guessed every one of her wishes. One word was sufficient; therefore, Madame de Vauban gave her servants the strictest orders that the Chamberlain's wife would not receive anybody; the slightest creak of the Chamberlain's boots announcing his coming to his wife's apartment, made Madame de Vauban rush to him and stop him at the door.

It was sufficient for Pani Walewska to doubt whether her blue dress was becoming to her to make Mme. de Vauban declare in a most solemn manner, although the Princess insisted upon its being worn, that the frock was too loud, and that the black dress was the only one that would suit Pani Walewska's beauty, and also represent the seriousness with which she was preparing to arm herself.

From hour to hour Pani Walewska's confidence in the Countess increased so much, that when towards evening Madame de Vauban was going to leave, the Chamberlain's wife regretted her departure sincerely, and besought her to keep her promise and come the next day to accompany her to Prince Borghese's dinner-party.

When the Countess was gone, when Pani Walewska reviewed in her mind the whole day, when she remembered that until very recently she had been prejudiced against Mme. de Vauban, and that she could not refrain from a malicious smile at the sound of her name, she felt a kind of regret, a kind of pricking of her conscience.

She was so unjust, she had judged her so superficially, so lightly, she had spoken of her so injuriously! It was true that she could not deny certain facts. . . .

Monsieur de Vauban's strange position towards Prince Joseph Poniatowski, and then those strange stories. . . . Who knows who was guilty? Sometimes life is so strange! A slander sticks so easily to a woman! The best proof of it was herself. She had not sinned even in her thoughts, and, notwithstanding that, what an amount of persuasion she was obliged to use in order to convince that noble-hearted Countess that she felt nothing for Gorayski but pure friendship, that she grieved over his unshared sentiment for her, that perhaps she had been guilty of a little bit of coquetry, but that she had never loved him, and that even her badly-assorted marriage had not aroused in her either a desire of emotions or a longing after love.

Madame de Vauban's incredulity in that respect, her inquisitiveness about Gorayski, seemed to Pani Walewska to be intrusive. As to the rest, she saw in the Countess reflections of her own thoughts, ideas, views and opinions; and that reflection was so strong, so many-sided, so complete, that it seemed to Pani Walewska that she had lived with the Countess years and years, and that at last she had found in her a dear and sincere friend; that now her isolation was ended, and that at every moment she would have advice, help, and hearty sympathy.

Pani Walewska had long wished for such a friend.

For a long time she was very fond of Jeannette Radziwil, whom she had met at boarding-school; but Jeannette, notwith-

standing her affection for Pani Walewska, hurt her very much by her aristocratic ideas; and then Jeannette disliked deeper thought and wider horizons.

When, after several years of separation, she again met Jeannette, she convinced herself that, notwithstanding an apparent cordiality, she could now less than ever understand the young Princess; that she was disappointed with her, and therefore she did not try to enter into her friend's soul, and to make their friendship lasting.

Amid this isolation and uncertainty, when she so much wished for a hearty word, Mme. de Vauban appeared.

Pani Walewska thought that the Countess must have some secret aim; that she came to her prompted by something different from that sympathy which was so difficult to describe. She almost read insincerity in Mme. de Vauban's face; she could distinguish false tones in her voice; she felt that her hands were cold, but, notwithstanding all that, she did not hesitate to accept the Countess's friendship.

Pani Walewska's face burned with the desire of confession, of finding an echo to her thoughts and apprehensions. She did not ask whether the person who was offering the refreshing drink had some secret aim in doing so. She drank the cup and felt better. She was alone, forsaken, bound by her husband's pettishness, who looked in every box, every drawer; and at last, thanks to the help of the Countess, she could breathe freely.

Only yesterday she was afraid of her husband's valet, who had an influence over his master, and who knew how to use it in order to annoy her. Now she was mistress, and it was thanks to Mme. de Vauban.

Pani Walewska did not try to find what means Mme. de Vauban used in order to assure her entire independence. She knew only that Mme. de Vauban had had three long talks with the Chamberlain, that the Princess was present during the conversation, and that the result was of great importance to herself.

After that day, so full of impressions and changes, Pani Walewska rose earlier than ever, put on a warm dressing-gown, and began to dress, joking and teasing her chambermaid, and

trying to find out whether her independence was still lasting. There were many opportunities for this.

In the first place she asked Baptiste, in the Chamberlain's name, whether he was going to serve breakfast; said that she would not go to the dining-room, and that she would have it served in her apartment. She sent away Joubert, who came by her husband's desire. She did not receive Pan Ksavery's wife, who called on her. She ordered the portraits of her husband's first two wives to be taken from her boudoir and hung in the dining-room. Only on one occasion her joyfulness was stopped. A big bouquet of violets was handed to her, with an explanation that it was brought by a grenadier of the Guards, and that the Chamberlain sent it to his wife.

Pani Walewska, without hesitation, ordered the bouquet to be returned to the grenadier, with an explanation that she was not well, and that she could not bear the perfume of the violets.

When the chambermaid had gone with the bouquet, Pani Walewska regretted her impulsiveness, for she was persuaded that her husband would be very angry, and would not permit such an excuse.

But the maid returned and told her that "his lordship made a grimace, but ordered her to carry out her ladyship's wish."

Pani Walewska could hardly believe it, and she told the servant to repeat the answer again, and to relate to her all the details that accompanied it.

The Chamberlain's wife felt something like gratitude towards her husband for respecting her wish, and not even attempting to change the form of her answer, as formerly he would have done.

After that small cloud, Pani Walewska's beautiful face brightened up with peace and confidence. She did not bother herself about Prince Borghese's dinner-party. She would not be there alone. Mme. de Vauban would accompany her, and with her she could look boldly into the eyes even of a whole regiment of such Durocs. Then she would be able to find means to get rid of his confidences, for now she had her own will. And if the Emperor—then she would tell him what she thought; with one word she would cut off all his hopes; and he—he is too chivalrous, he must carry his head too high, he

must be too proud not to be magnanimous, noble! Who knows . . . suppose there should be an opportunity—she would tell him about Paul. He had long deserved a captain's epaulettes, for he had served in the Polish legions for two years. He was already a lieutenant; he had twice been reported for advancement. . . . Ah! if she could! What a joy it would be! . . . She would say to the Emperor: "Your Majesty," or simply, "Sire . . . I am not begging for a favour, but I ask you for justice!" or, "Sire . . . permit me to speak in favour of one of your officers."

Pani Walewska laughed heartily at that thought. If only she could have an opportunity, she would tell him—she must tell him! Paul would be so happy!—so happy!

She was happy too. She sat at a spinet, played a few chords, and began to sing a gay French song. Her voice, at first low and timid, came forth from her throat fuller and fuller, bolder and bolder, till finally it resounded with its natural metallic sonority.

An innocent song, playful, flitting like a butterfly, vibrating with longer and longer, deeper and deeper sounds. Pani Walewska's lips repeated the words of the song, and its melody seemed to be an unconscious, thoughtless confession of her soul. In her singing there was something of rustic simplicity, full of unconscious longing, and something of the song of a bird hidden in a bush. The sun beams with golden rays, the earth breathes with balmy verdure, and the bird sings affectingly, confiding to the echo its secret sorrows that vibrate in every trill.

Pani Walewska sang without knowing why Prince Ornano's expressive face appeared before her mind, why his voice was coming to her in a mysterious whisper; why she saw Gorayski, and why she connected Duroc's voice with him; why the modest country house in which she was born was shining with lordly magnificence; why she heard the rustling of linden trees at Walewice.

The subdued laughter of Mme. de Vauban startled Pani Walewska, who rushed from the spinet almost ashamed, and greeted the Countess.

"You sing like a shepherdess! What a lovely gift!"

"Ah, to pass the time. . . ."

"On the contrary . . . I listened to the whole song . . . very romantic indeed."

"Let us not talk about that. I am so glad you came, for I must tell you frankly that I feared your kindness, which I have not deserved, was only a dream."

Mme. de Vauban was moved by such affection.

"You have no idea what a pleasure it is to me. I dreamed of having some one like you to myself. . . . Well, we have time. I ordered my frock to be brought here—it would be awful to be separated again."

"I do not know how to thank you."

"Dear child, it is rather I who should thank you. Tell me about yourself. I wish to know everything—what you were thinking of, what you were doing. About everything. When I got back home I was afraid that, after having thought things over, you would think me eccentric; that my sincere desire to become friendly with you at once would make you think that I am intruding! I do not recognise myself! Imagine to yourself, I did not believe in a friendship between two women, and I did not try to prove that my belief was wrong. There is such insincerity and falsehood in our world—but you have attracted me at once, you are so sincerely childlike. Do you remember when we met at the Potockis or Gutakowskis after your wedding?"

"At the Wojczynskis!" corrected Pani Walewska, who at once recollected the moment when, at their first meeting, Mme. de Vauban deigned hardly to nod to her, and having looked at her from head to foot, turned away.

"Ah, yes, at the Wojczynskis. I could not forget that moment; I felt towards you something that cannot be defined!"

The Countess ended these reminiscences by a warm kiss, and began to riddle Pani Walewska with questions.

The Chamberlain's wife told her all that had happened that morning, leaving the story of the bouquet to the end.

Mme. de Vauban listened very attentively to Pani Walewska's confidences, approving indulgently of everything, and only when she heard how the Guard was sent away she became suddenly sad, and sighed. Pani Walewska was confused, and hastened to justify herself.

"Could I act differently? I did not even ask who sent the

bouquet. I do not wish for such homages, neither have I the right to receive them."

"Yes . . . but one never refuses flowers."

"Never?"

"Yes, my dearest, for flowers not only personify remembrance, but also respect and worship. I do not know where I have read that the most cruel gods consider flowers to be the most agreeable sacrifice! As it seems, the cruel and merciless eyes of the Gorgon grew kinder at the sight of a flower. A flower pays homage by its touch; a flower cannot harm—it is pure even when people try to express their thoughts by it! From a flower there always breathes nobleness of nature, it always brings beauty to mind."

"But sometimes it hides poison; it makes one dizzy."

Mme. de Vauban half closed her glassy eyes.

"If one does not know how to handle it; if one leaves it in a closed bedroom; if one searches in it for that which it does not contain."

"Yes, but I was afraid I should find in the bouquet another letter."

"Why should you look for it?" answered Mme. de Vauban drily.

"But . . . involuntarily. . . ." Pani Walewska said in defence.

"Then one could pretend that one did not find the letter."

"Yes . . . it is true! although it is difficult to dissemble."

"But one must, one must, my dear child! I admire you just the same . . . then you are not even anxious to learn who sent the bouquet?"

"Yes, very much!" Pani Walewska returned. "Only I did not dare to ask, I trembled from fear to hear the name."

"Whose?"

"The Emperor's."

Madame de Vauban made a movement of impatience.

"Then you were afraid that such an honour might happen to you! Excuse me, but I do not understand you! You know that your Emperor will always be for me General Bonaparte, but I must say that it is very noble on his part. Notwithstanding everything, he is to-day the personification of might. And this ruler, whom your own country proclaimed a demigod,

humiliates himself, he uses a flower, which alone can be his interpreter, which alone can explain his thoughts, which means more than a thousand servants, than millions ready to die when he frowns, than a forest of bayonets, than that might which made the foundations of the world tremble! How poetic! . . . Tell me, is it possible that such homage, such honour, such respect paid to you, could be unpleasant to you, could not attract you, could insult you?"

Pani Walewska rubbed her forehead as if wishing to chase away the thoughts crowding into it.

"You see that already you have some doubts! Yes, yes; one accepts a flower always and from anybody—but it is done. For the future we shall be kinder. Although perhaps it is well that you did not accept the bouquet! I imagine that, if it was sent by the Emperor . . . the Marshal reports . . ."

"You must not speak in that way to me."

"Why not? On the contrary, the thing is worthy of thought. Do you know that I am persuaded that your refusal will produce a contrary effect."

"How is that?"

"It would be very natural! a little knowledge of human nature! The Emperor conceived a sympathy for you—do not deny it—and tries to express it. Until now he has been accustomed to everybody submitting to his will, but he finds resistance in you. A small circumstance, but sufficient to irritate him and to arouse in him a desire to conquer the opposition."

Pani Walewska grew confused at that logical deduction.

"Then you suppose . . ."

"That if a woman, knowing the art of coquetry, would like to arouse in somebody a more durable sentiment, she would undoubtedly act as you do!"

"But my intentions could not be doubted!"

"By me; but people—and then the question is not about them, but about the result!"

"No, you are mistaken; you must be mistaken! Otherwise it would be dreadful for me! The Marshal cannot doubt!"

"Yes, but I repeat that there is no question of doubts, but of the spirit of contradiction, of that which makes everything that

one gets with more difficulty, become dearer, more attractive, more agreeable."

Tears appeared in Pani Walewska's eyes. Madame de Vauban hastened to attenuate her predictions.

"My dear child, you must not take the matter so seriously, and grow sorrowful before the time. I only want to prove to you that your inaccessibility is a bad weapon, that your sending back the bouquet was too rash!"

"I do not know myself . . . I do not give any reason . . . I avoid! Perhaps I am mistaken. Then give me good advice."

Madame de Vauban kissed Pani Walewska.

"I thank you heartily for such confidence! Do not lose your self-possession. The Court laws, customs, and ways, are different. Listen to me. You have not any idea how much I feel obliged for your confidence! Be certain that I shall not permit you to be wronged. Only you must promise me absolute obedience. To your noble nature many things may seem strange and in contradiction to your ideas, but the Court is quite different from the life in which you were brought up. Life flows swiftly and turbulently in it, and only those come out safe who swim with its stream. Yes, only those who swim with the current come out safe; the most daring person who wishes to step across the waves is drowned. Do not be frightened, you have every chance of winning. . . ."

"Would it not be better to explain to my husband? He has some ambitious plans, which I cannot understand. Till now he has not occupied any prominent position, and now he is talking in such a way that sometimes I think he has lost his mind. As it seems, the Emperor has a particular regard for him, but it must be only a temporary favour, on which he builds very ambitious plans. I ought not to talk like this to you, but I wish you to know everything. My husband is not well. After every long reception he is ill, and his going much into society ruins his already bad health. Some one should talk to him. You could do it. . . . You would know how. . . . He has no confidence in me. . . ."

The Countess moved her head negatively, and having looked attentively at Pani Walewska's beautiful face, said emphatically: "You ask me impossible things!"

"If you were willing . . I have proofs that you can do much. . . ."

"Not in this case. . . ."

"Open his eyes. . . ."

"You are mistaken, my dear child; your husband sees perfectly well, and, if he perseveres, who knows, he may go very high. . . ."

"You think it is possible?"

"Entirely; only, I repeat, if he perseveres. H'm! It is not easy . . . but he has chances, especially with Napoleon. Look at those who surround him: he has made princes and dukes of farm-boys and grooms! Why should he, then, not give a little to the old family of Colonna Walewski?"

Pani Walewska tried to find out something more about her husband's chances, but Madame de Vauban got rid of her questioning by a few evasive words, and having glanced at the clock, she concluded: "One could spend years in chatting with you. Twelve o'clock! We have only one hour for dressing! We must call our servants!"

Pani Walewska rose. "I would give much if I could not go."

"And your promised obedience?"

"Suppose the Marshal again? . . ."

"Ah, what does it matter? Let him talk. Do not take his clumsy compliments seriously. Adopt a half-joking and half-consenting tone, and soon his apparent elegance will be exhausted. And then I shall watch over you and help you."

Pani Walewska rang for the servants, and ordered Madame de Vauban's things to be brought in.

The Chamberlain's wife's dressing-room was now swarming with servants, among whom ruled two tailors from Joubert, and Gaston, Madame de Vauban's coiffeur.

Pani Walewska looked with astonishment at the numerous servants moving with feverish haste and bringing more and more boxes, and when, at last, she perceived two lackeys carrying in a big mirror, she could not refrain from saying: "Had I known I should cause you so much trouble . .

Madame de Vauban smiled complacently.

"Ah, it is a trifle! At least, they have something to do! Only I have taken your whole dressing-room."

"I can dress myself in the boudoir."

"Very well, then! Do you see, my dear child, it is habit. . . . I could not get along without those things. . . . Suzanne, how much time have we?"

"Not a full hour, *Madame la Comtesse*."

"Will you be in time?" asked Madame de Vauban, alarmed.

Suzanne moved her head doubtfully.

Madame de Vauban fell with determination in an armchair before the mirror.

"Marie, hasten. Lucie will help you! Gaston, *dépêchez vous!*"

Pani Walewska looked for a while at Madame de Vauban making her toilet. She had heard often of its secrets; her husband was a proof that making a toilette was an art and a very important problem; but what she saw surprised her to the highest degree.

Madame de Vauban was almost carried in her servants' arms; with astonishing adroitness they changed dressing-gowns, putting on her a new one almost every minute. From a downy cloak covering Madame de Vauban when her face and her hands were sprinkled with rose-water, to a pale blue *peignoir*, which was a sign that Gaston was to proceed to his masterpiece on Madame de Vauban's head, everything had not only its box and its destination, but also its perfume.

The Countess had already changed her *peignoirs* three times, and Suzanne had not yet finished displaying different little boxes, small bottles and strange hooks, pincers, knives, brushes, and cosmetics. The concentration with which Pani Walewska looked on at those mysterious preparatives and doings, attracted Madame de Vauban's attention.

"Marie, it is time!" remonstrated the Countess, looking hesitatingly at the box of paint handed to her by Suzanne.

"I shall be in time."

Madame de Vauban made an impatient movement.

"Yes . . . but then, excuse me, my dear, I cannot talk with you now."

Pani Walewska understood the delicate allusion and entered her boudoir. When she passed Lucie, she noticed in her hand large locks of hair similar in colour to that of Madame de Vauban.

Pani Walewska felt uneasy, almost guilty towards Madame de Vauban at the discovery of such a secret.

In the boudoir, Pani Walewska's chambermaid was waiting for her with a box containing jewels of the family of Walewski.

"His lordship sends this, and begs her ladyship to choose according to her taste."

Pani Walewska looked indifferently on the glittering contents of the box, and having ordered it to be returned to her husband with thanks, began to dress.

The maid, however, returned again with the box.

"His lordship begs that her ladyship will take at least the diamond necklace."

Pani Walewska refused; the maid left with the answer. Pani Walewska had hardly time to put on a gown, when to her great alarm she heard at the door her husband coughing, followed by a gentle knocking.

"Marie, one word only. Impossible without the necklace!"

"Thank you, I do not need it!"

"How will you look? You must dress like the others! All the ladies will have their jewels—undoubtedly! Pray, do not be obstinate! Ask Madame de Vauban."

"Very well, I will ask her."

"We shall wait with the Princess in the drawing-room downstairs."

Pani Walewska breathed. Those family diamonds aroused in her some invincible aversion. She had worn them only a few times, and every time it seemed to her that the inimical looks of her husband's first two wives followed her, that those diamonds had some sepulchral, cold, and cadaverous smell.

Pani Walewska had determined to oppose her husband's wish, and wishing to gain at once an ally in the Countess, she was going to the door of her dressing-room, when, at the same moment, the door opened and Madame de Vauban appeared in it.

The Chamberlain's wife looked at her and was astonished, so beautiful did the Countess seem.

The enthusiasm was so visibly depicted in Pani Walewska's face, that Madame de Vauban smiled, guessing her impression.

"How do you like me now?"

"You are beautiful! What refinement, what a dress!"

"And imagine to yourself, in less than a whole hour! Suzanne has accomplished an impossibility. What a talent! . . ."

The Countess advanced, Pani Walewska looked at her with increasing attention, and she could not explain to herself something which made her admire Madame de Vauban at the first glance, but which now made her look like an old portrait of a withered lady that hung in her husband's room, and hardly had she become accustomed to that impression when that double of the portrait changed into a mask, set over a dressed lay figure.

Madame de Vauban did not notice that change of impression in Pani Walewska, and began, in her turn, to look at her attentively.

"H'm! Pray, turn to the light. Black velvet! Too serious! It needs something . . . round the neck. . . . Perhaps you have amethysts? They would be becoming to you. I am sure you have amethysts. . . ."

"No, not for anything in the world. You must not ask me. . . ."

"But I cannot! The neck is bare; it is lost! Do you understand, my dear child, it is lost, and it must not be."

Pani Walewska took a thin gold chain.

"I will take this chain. . . ."

"You are stubborn. Well . . . I have an idea . . . perhaps it will make an impression. . . . Suzanne! Powder! You will look more interesting . . . black dress . . . paleness . . . only the eyes . . . I will put Venetian drops . . . they will make your eyes fiery."

Pani Walewska shivered with aversion at the sight of the powder.

"No, thank you!"

"My dear child, you will make an impression."

"I do not wish to please anybody."

"Very well, but you ought to have an expression of sadness with melancholy; the Venetian drops will undoubtedly produce the effect. . . ."

"If you have the slightest sympathy for me, permit me to remain as I am."

Madame de Vauban tried still to persuade Pani Walewska; but having met with decided opposition, she gave in, and even promised to defend her in case her husband should insist on her wearing the diamonds.

In the meanwhile, in the drawing-room downstairs, the Chamberlain and the Princess waited, sending servants every little while and urging the ladies to hasten. The Chamberlain's impatience increased with every moment of waiting.

"We shall be too late!" he said anxiously to his sister. "And it is the fault of that . . . that . . ."

"But Vauban has the best intentions. . . ."

"I have seen that since yesterday! She spoils her! I am patient, but only for a time. She acts as if she were in her own house, and should it last longer . . ."

The Princess answered with indifference—

"Just as you please."

The Chamberlain looked hesitatingly at his sister.

"You yourself have persuaded me . . ."

"Not of this, that Vauban will be able to win the confidence of that treasure of yours, or to prepare her for such an important rôle. . . ."

"I do not ask for that. I see, however, that her teaching begins by trifling with me, by opposition. . . ."

"Vauban has her plans! If she wishes to realise them, she must make some concessions."

"Well, I had make a mistake! You have assailed me with your persuasions; I have given in, and now I regret! I did not need that help."

"You can get rid of it very easily."

"You say so, but you hold on to your ideas. As it is, it is not we who need her, but she who needs us."

"Yes, if your wife had more experience, who knows . . It is your fault; you kept her closeted; you would not show her. . . ."

"It was your advice. . . ."

"I did not suppose that you would go as far as that."

"So! . . . Then, perhaps, I should have taken her to the Poniatowskis?"

"I would not say that! If you intended to withdraw for

ever from public life, then your wife's seclusion would have had some common sense. To-day, you see, she may have influence!"

"I do not wish for too much!"

"Ah, one must not go far in surmising. Favour of the Emperor, who is exceedingly severe on love intrigues! Why not take advantage, when I assure you Talleyrand himself, when I wanted to find out what you could expect, told me precisely: 'I cannot tell you everything, for Madame Walewska's own word can change even the Emperor's decision'? Those are M. de Périgord's words. Fancy! Innocent feebleness! Marie is simply lucky! Therefore if she knew, she could do much! Anetka, although she is not friendly, assured me that Marie is at the head of the ladies invited to the Court!"

The Chamberlain lifted himself on his tiptoes and puffed out his cheeks—his face brightened up. He, however, concealed the impression made on him by such an honour, and was already going to answer indifferently that he did not see anything extraordinary for the family of Walewski when Madame de Vauban and Pani Walewska entered the drawing-room.

"At last!" cried the Princess joyfully.

"My fault! Joubert was too late! We may be going! Marie will come with me."

"But who will conduct her to the drawing-room?" asked the Chamberlain.

"Prince Borghese receives, and then you can follow us closely. We have so much to tell each other."

"Yes, yes!" interceded the Princess. "We must not lose time. Marie, let me kiss you! Dear child! I am yours with all my heart! Countess I admire your taste."

Madame de Vauban being persuaded about her exquisite taste, stretched herself and turned round, giving a chance to the Princess to admire Joubert's masterpiece.

"Charming!" said the Princess, and having bent a little forward to Madame de Vauban whispered to her:

"What a horrid mourning frock she has put on."

"One must be heroic to put up with it all," answered the

Countess, also in a whisper; and looking towards Pani Walewska, she said aloud—

"Do you not find that our dear Marie looks very interesting?"

"Beautiful! What refinement in that simplicity!"

"And how becoming is the black velvet to her pale face. Chamberlain, you ought to congratulate . . ."

The Chamberlain came to his wife with far-fetched gallantry, kissed her hand and said in a whisper: "You know my opinion about Dombrowski's partisans; therefore, should you have an opportunity, say something. One must make an end of them. Say that the temporary Government is very much disliked, that the members of it do not deserve such honour. . . ."

"I—I have to speak, with whom?"

"Only with the Emperor himself. . . . Not a word to anybody else. . . . One does not know where there may be treachery. . . . Do not trust even that. . . . You must be careful. . . ."

The Chamberlain cleared his throat, satisfied with himself that he had succeeded in reminding his wife about his political opinions, and in the meanwhile in pointing out to her the principal aim to which she should direct her efforts.

Pani Walewska could hardly understand her husband's sudden exhortations; but there was no time for elucidation, for the Princess and Madame de Vauban urged them to hasten.

The servants put fur cloaks on the ladies.

Baptiste wrapped up the Chamberlain in shawls and furs.

"Then, we are going first, Marie. Follow us!" concluded Madame de Vauban, and went out, followed closely by Pani Walewska, her husband and the Princess.

Madame de Vauban's carriage rolled on swiftly.

The Chamberlain's wife had hardly any time to exchange a few words when she found herself in the presence of smiling, elegant, and pretentiously solemn Prince Borghese.

Pani Walewska was so taken aback by the impetuous and clumsy compliments of the Prince, that she could not find an answer to them. Madame de Vauban, however, came to her help, and not only found an excuse for their coming late, but also learned that the Emperor was expected only in about an

hour's time, because of the arrival of the courier from Sebastiani, the Emperor's ambassador at Constantinople.

That news permitted Pani Walewska to recover her self-possession, for the mere idea that at any moment she might meet the Emperor's piercing look had taken her courage away.

In the meanwhile, in the drawing-room another surprise was in store for her, which irritated her very much.

Hardly had she appeared, leaning on Prince Borghese's arm, when all his guests rushed to meet her, and, rustling with silks, clanking with spurs, and bowing, surrounded Pani Walewska, and there was no end of greeting, bows, hand-shaking, compliments, words full of enthusiasm and submission.

Grey heads, haughty *toupets* and smooth wigs, all bowed to Pani Walewska.

Martial faces tried to be serene; grimaces which expressed friendship and cordiality twisted even such cold and unexpressive faces as that of Marshal Davoust, or such proudly quiet ones as that of Malachowski.

Pani Walewska did not even try to answer all those homages.

She became purple, the breath stopped in her spasmodically heaving breast, fear whirled in her head, awful, merciless, irresistible conjectures overcame her, exclamations, greetings, and particularly emphasised words poured towards her.

"*Toujours exquise!*" whispered Countess Potocka, half closing her eyes.

"You appear to us like the morning star before the sun!" muttered Count Lubienski.

"Dear Mary, you do not imagine what joy it is for me!" exclaimed Countess Moszynska.

"To look at you means to be happy!" said Murat pompously, shaking the plumes of his swaggering hat.

"Do you remember me? I am Breza," spoke a tall man, bending his thick neck with difficulty.

"Do you not recognise Gutakowska? I remember you since you were a child."

"I have greeting for you from Jeannette."

"I am very glad."

"Your humble servant!"

"We have intended for a week past to call on you."

"Let me kiss you; improper, but I cannot forbid my heart."

Madame de Vauban, watching over Pani Walewska, deemed it necessary to free her from those homages, and whispered a few words to Prince Borghese, who nodded affirmatively, and conducted the Chamberlain's wife to a place where a few armchairs stood under a column.

Pani Walewska sat in one of them. Madame de Vauban occupied another, and the crowd of guests moved and scattered for a moment, and then surrounded her again.

The Chamberlain's wife could not refrain from a remark, and whispered to Madame de Vauban.

"I do not understand the reason of all this?"

"You do not?" repeated the Countess, with such a voice that Pani Walewska shivered, for it seemed to her that she heard the same voice now in herself, and that Madame de Vauban's cold and sneering voice was the echo of that other voice.

"No!" whispered Pani Walewska mechanically.

The Countess covered herself with her fan in order to conceal her smile.

"My dear friend, you are surprised! Well, these people are playing at a court, and they try to follow the thoughts and looks of their master. . . . If you prefer, they perhaps expect power in your influence!"

"Then these people . . ."

"Are very clumsy, are they not? For, speaking between ourselves, it is impossible to revive the splendour of the Louis with *sansculottes*. Ah, those Frenchmen who are here . . . It is simply painful. But, pay attention, Prince Borghese is conducting the Austrian ambassador to us! You can see in him a man who frequents a true court. . . ."

"General Vincent!" introduced Prince Borghese.

The General bent in a respectful bow.

"Madame, I consider it an honour. . . ."

"We are glad!" graciously answered Madame de Vauban, showing to the ambassador the armchair beside Pani Walewska. "If I am not mistaken, you arrived only yesterday. Directly from Vienna? Our small world must seem strange to you?"

"Is it small?" quietly answered the ambassador, weighing every word as was his custom. "As it seems, the bigger is here."

"For those who wish to have it so."

"Or who must!" added the ambassador with a double meaning, and, as if wishing to lessen too strong an expression, he said sententiously: "We are living in feverish times, in which history chooses small places, and proves unexpectedly that there, where she walks . . ."

The Countess laughed.

"You are thinking of Ajaccio! I have only learnt that it is possible be born there. How is Count Stadion?"

The Austrian General looked inquisitively at Madame de Vauban, for he did not understand what the name of the Prime Minister meant in her mouth, and said abruptly: "Thank you, the Count, as usual, is very busy."

"Should you have an opportunity, pray assure him that I count the time spent in his house among the most pleasant moments of my life. And how is the Countess? I heard she was very ill."

"She is better."

"The Prince de Ligny told me so in his last letter, but he was afraid of a relapse."

"I am very grateful. Count Stadion will be pleased at your solicitude."

"It is not solicitude, it is something that remains in my soul. . . ."

The General nodded, and, caressing the green plumes of his hat, looked discreetly towards Pani Walewska, who so far had not taken any part in the conversation; and when Madame de Vauban ended another still more pompous sentence concerning her memories of Vienna, the General turned suddenly to the Chamberlain's wife.

"It seems the Emperor will be late?"

"A courier from Constantinople from General Sebastiani kept his Majesty," answered Pani Walewska quietly, glad that she could answer without any effort.

Vincent made a movement.

"Are you certain?"

"Prince Borghese told me so. Am I mistaken?"

Madame de Vauban made a grimace. The ambassador looked round uneasily.

"I see, General, that you take advantage of an introduction," resounded Prince Borghese's voice from one side.

Vincent rose slowly.

"I could not find words to express my gratitude!"

"Then you surrender! You understand that even diplomacy must be defeated here."

"Entirely. To the splendour of the gathering, nothing but Majesty is lacking."

"Soon!" said the Prince.

"General Sebastiani has chosen a bad moment," said the General, negligently adjusting the riband on his white uniform.

Prince Borghese smiled, trying to understand what Vincent knew about Sebastiani.

"A . . . Sebastiani?"

"Well, yes, for he sent a courier on the day and hour of your reception.

Prince Borghese wanted to laugh, when the severe voice of the Secretary of State, Maret, sounded beside them.

"General, you are mistaken."

Prince Borghese grew confused, looking with uneasiness at Maret.

"I do not think so," answered Vincent coolly, "for a short time since a courier from Constantinople arrived. Prince, am I not right?"

"Courier? I do not know anything—I have not heard," stammered the Prince, feeling upon him the inquisitive look of one of the most faithful satellites of Napoleon.

"Such being the case, I must justify myself and say that I am repeating what you, Prince, told Madame Walewska."

The Emperor's brother-in-law reddened, and looked angrily at the ambassador.

"The Prince thought that such an explanation was plausible," said Maret coolly. "A courier goes directly to the Emperor's study; nobody knows or can know anything about him; just as nobody has anything to do with the instructions received by you to-day from Count Stadion—the said instructions being the

result of the endeavour of the well-known adventurer Pozzo di Borgo."

The ambassador tried to conceal the perpendicular wrinkle that appeared against his will on his forehead. Prince Borghese dropped his head like a boy caught in some mischief.

Maret, however, did not take advantage of the ascendency he had gained, but turned the conversation on the brilliancy of the impending review of the troops, and having attracted to the group Count Stanislaus Potocki, who was just passing by, he withdrew towards Pani Walewska.

The Chamberlain's wife was just listening to Anetka Tyszkiewicz's friendly effusions, who, with her usual fluency, spoke at once about the bother caused by Murat, who had his quarters in her palace, and about the expected arrival of the Turkish ambassador, and about Pani Gutakowska's old-fashioned frock, and about Herceau's violence, and about her love for art, and about the late king's cook, Tremo, who refused to superintend the dinner for Prince Borghese.

Maret bowed to Pani Walewska, greeted Madame de Vauban and Anetka Tyszkiewicz with a few kind words, and stood behind the Chamberlain's wife's armchair.

At the sight of Prince Bassano, Anetka whispered to Pani Walewska—

"My most hearty congratulations; there is no doubt whatever! Maret is behind you. . . ."

"May I ask about what you are talking—although if it is a secret . . . ?" asked Prince Bassano.

Anetka smiled cunningly.

"No, it is not a secret, and even if we had a secret you would know it by the right of your office. Ah, I pity you! To possess so many secrets, so much State news, and not to be able to tell them, it must be dreadful!"

"Not at all; capacity of silence suffices."

Anetka laughed.

"Is it enough? No, no; if I were a man I would never accept the portfolio of the Secretary of State. Every time I look at you, I pity you. How much mysterious news you could tell!"

"You are mistaken. The secrets I possess are usually such

that everybody who knows how to look, how to listen and be silent, may know them."

"Your modesty does not lessen your merits! For us you are the source of news."

"And the shadow of his Majesty!" added Madame de Vauban. "Your appearance either precedes or follows the Emperor."

"Very well said," rejoined Anetka. "Even to-day, your presence here testifies undoubtedly that that horrid courier from Constantinople has been sent away! Is it not so?"

"You are interested in politics?"

"I cannot deny it! Would you refuse the diplomatic functions to us women?"

"Not at all; only not in Paris, and not with our Emperor!" answered Maret emphatically, and looked significantly at Pani Walewska.

Anetka made a grimace.

"Who knows, who knows! Your opinion does not decide."

"But at present it will not fail."

"Naturally," said Anetka precipitately. "Political abilities do not go together with appearances, which are lucky if they attract attention or are successful for a moment! Marie, is it not true?"

Pani Walewska blushed, not knowing why.

"Your opinion is worthy to be remembered," said Madame de Vauban suddenly.

Anetka looked at her provokingly.

"Do you think differently?"

"It is difficult to answer in a few words. There are plenty of intrigues at every Court, but often those are victorious which were meant for quite different purposes."

Anetka turned again to Pani Walewska.

"And you, Marie?"

"My dear, she has not your experience," said Madame de Vauban coolly.

"So much the worse for her if she has not!" answered Anetka sharply; and having noticed M. de Flahaut beside her, she said with intentional exaggeration: "You wished to be introduced to Countess de Vauban! Chevalier de Flahaut! I tell you he

simply did not leave me a minute of rest. Imagine, M. de Flahaut's mother writes to him from Paris about you—you were her vis-à-vis in a minuet at a ball. . . ."

Madame de Vauban bit her lips. Flahaut could hardly refrain from laughing.

As for Anetka, not losing her assurance for a moment, she related some details of that ball thirty years ago.

In the meanwhile, Prince Bassano, taking advantage of the moment, bent towards Pani Walewska and asked her suddenly: "Do you believe in sympathy conceived for people of whom we know either but very little or nothing?"

"I have had no opportunity . . ."

"Well, I beg to assure you that at the first glance I conceived for you a great respect. . . . If you would accept a friendship . . ."

Pani Walewska played nervously with her fan, not knowing what she could do with the minister's sudden declaration.

Prince Bassano stopped for a while as if wishing to underline his intimation, and finished in a still lower voice—

"And that friendship urges me to make a remark—a very friendly one: do not mingle in politics, do not permit yourself to be used as a tool. . . ."

"But, Prince, you must excuse. . . . I have not the slightest inclination, and I understand so little, that truly . . ."

"I believe you!" interrupted Maret precipitately. "But to-day—here—in conversation with General Vincent, you told him about the arrival of a courier from Constantinople. . . ."

"But Prince Borghese . . ."

"I understand he committed an indiscretion, but you should not have repeated that news to the Austrian ambassador."

"I must be excused. I did not think that Prince Borghese would say anything that might not be repeated. I am so sorry."

"Pray do not take my words so earnestly. . . . I do not doubt your good intentions. My friendly remark is not to be despised. The Emperor hates women mingling in politics."

"The Emperor!" asked Pani Walewska with astonishment, looking at the minister with her big, sapphire-like blue eyes.

"*L'Empereur!*" announced the voice of M. de Ségur, Master of the Ceremonies, at the entrance of the drawing-room.

Maret, bowing, withdrew from Pani Walewska's chair and went to Davoust.

There was a general movement in the room, followed by deep silence, in which one could hear Napoleon's nervous steps; he was followed by Duroc, Berthier, and Talleyrand.

Having made a few steps, the Emperor, by a slight movement of his head, answered the bows greeting him from all sides, and having exchanged a few words with his brother-in-law, passed between the gathered people, distributing kind words from time to time.

Pani Walewska, surprised at the warning given to her by Prince Bassano, as well as by the Emperor's sudden entrance, drew nearer to Madame de Vauban, who guessed her thoughts, for she answered her movement by pressing her hand.

"Courage, my dear child! I am near you! Anetka is bilious. So much the worse for her! I have heard what Bassano told you. He is a horrid man! Let Borghese suffer. Only you must not take it to heart. Courage will do everything. Duroc is coming to us! You must not show that you remember the last conversation with him! Do not take it seriously. . . ."

Pani Walewska had hardly time to tell herself that she ought not now to lose her presence of mind, and ought to turn the Grand Marshal's words into a joke, when Duroc already stood before her, beaming in his crimson uniform and gold embroideries.

"Humility opens the gates of heaven! You must attribute to it my daring in presenting you my homages."

"The honour is on my side!"

"I am so happy to see you here."

"Therefore I admire your being satisfied with so little."

"To answer your modesty by a compliment would seem to offend you. Where the starlight falls, there human words are but earthly noise. Countess, permit me to greet you."

"*Monsieur le Maréchal!*" said Madame de Vauban through her teeth, in answer to Duroc's bow. "I permitted myself to listen to you, and I wonder at your eloquence. You unite the polish of the courtiers of Versailles to the sentiment of the troubadours."

"You are very kind!"

"And you embarrassed Madame Walewska. For it is difficult to speak as fast as you do. Moreover, our language possesses so many inflections, so much subtlety and softness, that my friend is afraid to compete with you."

"Very unjustly indeed, if one compares my array of words with that of the eyes of Madame Walewska; further, that cleverness of words, which you are kind enough to attribute to me, is so feeble, so slight, that only fear can be my privilege."

"You do not look intimidated at all!" rejoined Pani Walewska boldly, Duroc's serene face having inspired her with confidence.

"But it cannot be otherwise!"

"How so?" inquired Madame de Vauban.

"Yes, Madame, for to lose in a fight with a woman means sometimes more than to win. It is to die amid flowers—delightful, Epicurean death! And would you believe that I am threatened with that sort of death?"

"Impossible to believe it!"

"And it is here! In a country in which every bough, every leaf, requires so much care, in order to make it appear in this cold world—to die like Nero's guests, like a Roman intoxicated with Falernian wine; to die crushed by flowers, and to have a ceiling overhead instead of the Italian sky; instead of the golden sun of Rome—mist, and wood burning in a fireplace is worthy of commiseration!"

Pani Walewska looked at Duroc with curiosity, and said—

"Pray explain that entangled allusion, which undoubtedly hides some witticism."

"There is no allusion, Madame! I have not said too much! My rooms are filled up with flowers. There are more of them every hour . . . from modest violets to stately camellias, from delicate lilies of the valley to intruding narcissus. . . ."

"And every species, every colour, every perfume, signifies another victim! Is it not so?"

Duroc made a grimace with comical seriousness.

"Countess, you are too far from the truth!"

"Then those flowers?"

"The brave soldiers of the Guard bring them to me, raking all the greenhouses within a radius of twenty miles. And I wish

to get rid of those dizzying neighbours by sending them where they are destined, to the feet before which they should be strewn; but there the flowers are despised, and are not accepted."

"You have the explanation in your own words!" said Pani Walewska jokingly.

"One is afraid to be dazed. . . ."

Madame de Vauban touched Pani Walewska with her fan. Attentive to everything, Duroc, instead of answering, retreated.

The crowd of Prince Borghese's guests stepped aside, and against the background of velvet, silk dresses, and rich military uniforms, Pani Walewska beheld Napoleon following M. de Ségur.

"You will be presented," whispered Madame de Vauban.

Pani Walewska grew pale, preparing herself to execute the prescribed curtsey.

A moment of waiting, which seemed to Pani Walewska a century, followed. She heard the voice of the Master of the Ceremonies, she heard a conversation, words pronounced by the Emperor to one of the ladies standing by; she saw Talleyrand's *lorgnon* directed at her from behind Napoleon's shoulder, and she felt how every moment attracted more looks toward her; how those looks magnetised her. Amidst the whispers she distinguished Napoleon's footsteps, and in the meanwhile it seemed to her that she was surrounded by a mist, that she was standing in an empty space over a precipice; and from that precipice, covered with clouds, a face cast in steel, with a mouth of bronze, with eyes burning like fire, was looking at her.

That face emerged from the clouds and approached Pani Walewska—it advanced during hours, years, centuries, and on its forehead there was written with flame-like letters: "Yield, or I crush you."

Suddenly M. de Ségur's purple uniform rubbed the Chamberlain's wife lightly, and in the meanwhile his sonorous voice vibrated: "Madame Marie Colonna—Walewska!"

She stood as if riveted to the ground, seeing before her the abyss and the face covered with clouds.

Someone touched Pani Walewska's shoulder; she bent her head, and entangled in the train of her dress, she retreated.

"Ah, your husband was a chamberlain of the Court! I am glad to see you!"

Pani Walewska lifted her head and beheld the Emperor before her, looking at her serenely and smiling ceremoniously.

That smile brought her to her senses—restored her strength and dissipated the vision.

"Sire!" answered Pani Walewska with her sonorous voice, according to the most noble modulation of court etiquette, which prescribed that to that one word should be put the fullest enthusiasm for the imperial words.

Then she curtseyed to Napoleon in the most elegant way.

The Emperor turned away slowly, not paying any attention to the significant movement of M. de Ségur, who, according to the programme, was to present Madame de Vauban; he came to the Austrian ambassador, and said aloud: "What news from Vienna, General?"

"Your Majesty, the roads are so bad, that I do not expect the courier before I receive a reply to my last note."

"But that does not hinder you from receiving news from your Prime Minister."

"Sire, deign to believe that to-day it is more easy for a courier to pass to Turkey through the Russian frontier."

"I do not think so," answered Napoleon abruptly. "The Prime Minister Stadion would find hindrance to communication if he had avoided Austerlitz!"

The ambassador stretched himself and lifted his head.

"I shall communicate the hint given to me to the minister Stadion without any commentaries."

Napoleon made a movement of impatience.

"I do not understand, myself, what is his aim! He wishes to try my patience! The example of Prussia is not sufficient for you?"

"Sire, I am unable to understand the connection which you are so kind as to see."

"I have proofs of how much your assurance means. You received Goetz, the envoy of defeated Prussia; you maintain friendly relations with St. Petersburg through Merveldt. Is not that enough? And the army going to Galicia?"

General Vincent drew nearer Napoleon. "I permit myself, Sire, to draw your attention to my credentials, which I had the honour to present. . . . My presence alone . . ."

"Proves everything but sincerity. You permit yourself to be humbugged with the idea that you will gain an alliance with exhausted states. You forget that on the shores of the Rhine I have an army ready to back my words!"

"I can assure you, Sire, that the Austrian Court never had more peaceful intentions than it has to-day, and that it not only intends to keep friendly relations, but also would like to stop the tempest. But the Austrian Court must also remember the integrity of its frontiers, and must keep order within them. In the meanwhile, a flame is beginning to rage here which so naturally connected with the combustible materials in Galicia that, Sire, my Emperor is obliged to remember the danger, especially when he does not know, Sire, either your plans or the limits of your declared movements!"

Napoleon frowned, and said nervously: "It is time for you to know that I keep treaties; I have given proofs of it."

"But there is no question about the treaty, but about events standing beyond it."

"You have placed troops to preserve order on the frontier of Galicia."

"To what does it amount, when thousands of proclamations signed by Dombrowski and Wybicki, and in your name, Sire, penetrate and excite peaceful minds, encourage desertion, arouse confidence in your Majesty's protection."

"It is impossible!"

"My Emperor would like not to believe it, but Governor Wurmser sends proclamations every day that he has seized, and the commandant of the cordon, Count Neupperg . . ."

"Enough, General! If anything of the kind happens, it is an abuse, which I shall order to be stopped. Then you can assure your Emperor that if I have some plans in regard to this Prussian province, I do not propose to resuscitate dead men! I think that such an answer should suffice."

"Entirely, Sire, especially in conjunction with the preventive orders which you assure me are carried out."

Napoleon nodded, and looked sharply at the group of his satellites.

Prince Bassano was the lucky one who guessed the Emperor's wish, and he came near.

"Sire?"

"Wybicki!" commanded Bonaparte. Wybicki came at once. General Vincent discreetly withdrew towards Murat, not losing sight of the face of the hated agitator, the evil spirit of the Viennese diplomacy of those days.

The Emperor was silent, as if pondering over something.

Wybicki stood for a while in an attitude full of respect, and then said with his customary simplicity—

"You were kind enough to call me, Sire?"

Bonaparte put his hand deeper under the uniform on his breast, and asked severely: "What is the meaning of those proclamations distributed in Galicia? Who dares to abuse my name in such a way? Do you wish to begin disorders again? You do not respect frontiers? Speak! Why do you not speak?"

Wybicki bent under the burden of those words; he passed his hand mechanically over his forehead, and dropped his head.

"You are unable even to deny it!" scolded the Emperor severely. "Perhaps you yourself favoured that madness? Why do you not speak?"

This time Wybicki lifted his head. There was not a drop of blood in his face; it was not pale, but yellow, like a corpse.

"Sire!" said Wybicki at last, dominating with an effort the rattling of his throat. "Sire, when you spoke to us in Berlin you said nothing about frontiers."

"For they should be respected of themselves."

"Therefore, if we were carried away by hope, then say one word, Sire, and the songs of the Polish legions shall become silent, and with them shall cease faith in the sacrifice of our blood shed in Italy. And although because of that I shall be covered with ignominy for my blind confidence and faith in your power and your might, that will be easier for me than to deny my brothers, or to resuscitate some of them while others are plunged into hopeless darkness."

Wybicki wiped cold perspiration from his forehead.

The Emperor looked at him more quietly and more kindly.

"Then you imagine that for your sake I shall provoke a third state against my army? That I shall begin a war with Austria when two armies are ready to march against me! And do you

know what the victory at Pultusk meant for Lannes' division? One more such victory and I may be obliged to retreat. Do you understand? And then, where are the soldiers? Where are the armies? Where are the thousands of volunteers you promised?"

"They are coming in every day."

"But they are not sufficient to fill the gaps of my ranks. Come to your common sense, and tell the others to do the same! You must strike out Galicia from your plans, otherwise you will be obliged to give up all hopes! With Austria I am bound by a treaty by which you are bound also. I admire your self-sacrifice. I have good intentions towards your country, but I demand obedience! You were overthrown by centuries; years might make you stand up—years, but not one day! And then, where is your strength? Where are proofs that the rotten tree could become green again? Words! You are strong in words, but you are lacking in deeds. Remember that which is not in you could not be given to you by any interventions, by any treaty!"

"Sire!" whispered Wybicki, bending under Bonaparte's weight of words, "then command, what shall we do?"

"Remain within the boundaries of the Prussian provinces, and then learn how to judge things quietly. Bassano!"

Maret came to the Emperor.

"Look at Monsieur Wybicki! Hot-headed man! If he were in your place, in one week we would have the whole of Europe against us. Well, well, Monsieur Wybicki, I respect you even when you are as gloomy as you are now."

Wybicki bowed. Napoleon turned to Prince Poniatowski.

The Emperor's conversation with Wybicki, and the latter's emotion, did not escape the inquisitive looks of Prince Borghese's guests.

Wybicki, wishing to avoid the intrusive questions that were addressed to him, came to Murat, and began a conversation about expected provisions for the army, but the cautious Prince of Berg got rid of him with a few words.

Wybicki turned to Talleyrand, but he also cut short the conversation. He was not better treated by M. de Ségur, nor even by Prince Borghese.

The suspicion that Wybicki had lost the Emperor's favour made the courtiers' necks stiff, and cooled down at once their former affection for him.

Wybicki bit his lips. He was looking among French dignitaries, not for a favour, not help, not friendship, but simply for a moment of indifferent conversation, which would permit him to cool down and to postpone a chat with Malachowski, whose looks he felt, and he was certain that he would have to undergo another discussion, perhaps still more important in its consequences.

Wybicki's fears were soon justified, for before Prince Borghese succeeded in withdrawing from him, Malachowski came. Wybicki wished to avoid him, but Malachowski took hold of his arm.

"Have you something to say?"

"Nothing! Nothing now."

"I thought you had an important conversation with the Emperor! Should you like to keep it secret?"

"You know very well that I have no secrets from you. Permit me, however, to think a little, that I may not say some absurdity."

Malachowski conducted Wybicki to a window, and said, with trembling voice—

"I beseech you to tell me the truth! You are moved! I know that you would not be so impressed with a trifle. We are standing in a crossway; one imprudent step, and we are in peril! Speak! You doubt yourself. As for me, I fear Napoleon! He wants soldiers, sacrifices; he wants more than we can give, and in exchange for that he does not even promise anything."

"The game is begun; there cannot be a question about withdrawing."

"So you think! If we have no guarantees to-day, we turn elsewhere."

"Who?"

"All of us! The whole temporary Government will abandon Napoleon; and with us . . ."

"Nobody!" interrupted Wybicki passionately. "Nobody will follow us! Perhaps twenty, a hundred—two hundred, that will be all; the whole nation is for Napoleon."

"Then you congratulate yourself on the great success! . . ."

"I did wish him well; and notwithstanding all, I believe . . . in the Emperor! He must count with politics. . . ."

"With everybody but us!"

"Our task is to show him that we also constitute a force!"

Malachowski smiled bitterly.

"It is difficult to prove that to a man who does not wish even to listen. How does he speak to us? How does he answer? He commands, not taking into consideration our plans. Does he treat you differently—although you deserved to be trusted."

"It is true! If we could have some one at the Court who could enlighten him, who could help us, who could frustrate intrigues! Who would be of the Court? . . ."

"Do you think of Murat?"

"No, no! Murat could do nothing. The Emperor appreciates him as a soldier, but he does not conceal his distrust of his ability!"

"And for this reason he wishes to adorn him with our crown?"

"Gossip, that is all! I asked Maret; he flatly denied it, and he does not lie! We must think things over. We must find some one near the Emperor. I do not know, though, whom. I think the best would be Prince Joseph. . . . We could come to some understanding. We must not despise that means."

"Then we have come to that! We must find such roads!"

"Politics has its means—not always worthy, but often infallible. We were never politicians, and to the political intrigues surrounding us we opposed sentimental excuses and reproaches, instead of answering with the same weapons."

Wybicki, having recovered his self-possession and feeling his superiority over Malachowski, induced him to approach Poniatowski, who stood at the other end of the room listening indifferently to Rautenstrauch's talk.

Seeing Malachowski and Wybicki coming to him, the Prince stretched himself negligently; as to Rautenstrauch, he wished to emphasise his familiarity with the Prince, and said confidentially to Wybicki: "I hope you will not refuse us the news, for the Prince and I are both in conjectures, and do not know whether it is only gossip."

Wybicki made a grimace, but answered, trying to be civil to one of the Prince's assistants.

"I must first know the gossip, although I must tell you that I am not a news-hunter."

"But the question is about the Emperor. They say that he is in love."

Wybicki frowned.

"I do not wonder to hear such news from you."

Rautenstrauch reddened.

Prince Joseph hastened to defend his favourite.

"You are too impulsive," he said quietly. "That about which Rautenstrauch is talking has all the marks of truth! You came only to-day to Warsaw, therefore you may not know. Even Talleyrand does not make any secret . . ."

"One cannot trust Talleyrand. He is known for his jests."

"Madame Walewska, however, enjoys Duroc's special attention."

"And undoubtedly has influence," said Malachowski, unexpectedly.

"It may be; I have heard of it, but I doubt it being anything durable."

"One cannot guarantee that! Even concluding from the past, one must not be certain that that sympathy will pass quickly!" said the Prince sarcastically.

"With all that, Samson has found Dalilah at Jablonna. Pray look to the left. Duroc is constantly with her. She has influence—it is certain."

"They say that she is not very clever! Short success! . . ."

"Although with a good guide! Madame de Vauban is very much interested in Madame Walewska."

Poniatowski looked angrily at Rautenstrauch.

"She must always have a finger in things!"

"She wishes to live by other people's lives!" defended Rautenstrauch.

The Prince bit his lips.

"Gentlemen, be so kind as to stand near the ladies!" was heard M. Philippe de Ségur's voice. "M. Wybicki, his Majesty wishes to have you near him."

There was a general uproar in the room. Uniforms and

Court dresses moved towards frocks, bowed and complimented, spying in the meanwhile M. de Ségur's indications as to the place they should occupy.

The Master of the Ceremonies was very much embarrassed, for he could not count on Prince Borghese's help; and in the meanwhile the old descent was opposed by existing rank, the Emperor's likings by ambitions, mutual aversion by competition.

In order to avoid all difficulties he used a trick—that is to say, that on both sides of the Emperor's chair he put people who, according to etiquette, had undoubted rights, leaving the remaining places to individual industry.

Therefore the Emperor was seated between Madame Gutakowska and Anetka Potocka; further on sat General Vincent, Wybicki, Malachowski, Murat and Berthier.

Opposite the Emperor were seated Prince Joseph Poniatowski, the Princess Radziwil, Talleyrand, Bassano, Davoust; at last, as if by an accident, Duroc and Pani Walewska.

It was done so quickly, that before any one could grumble, he heard the Master of the Ceremonies' words full of compassion—

"You are here? How sorry I am! But it is Prince Borghese's fault; everybody sat where he pleased. I am so sorry! What a disagreeable situation! . . ."

These words acted admirably.

Even the guests sitting at the further ends of the table were looking towards the centre of the table with a feeling of superiority.

In the meanwhile, Pani Walewska, having found herself, thanks to Duroc, almost opposite the Emperor, experienced the same feeling of numbness as during her presentation, but it passed away quickly. Duroc, carefully watching his neighbour, knew how, by a clever conversation, to help her to regain her self-possession, in which he succeeded much the more easily because the Emperor seemed not to look at all at Pani Walewska.

This last circumstance was the principal cause of her self-possession returning to her, and even of arousing in her a certain amount of curiosity with which she looked at the Emperor.

Duroc was entertaining her, while Talleyrand, sitting on Pani

Walewska's other side, not only took part in the Emperor's conversation with General Vincent, but also made from time to time some malicious remark to the Chamberlain's wife.

Consequently, from the Grand Marshal, Pani Walewska learned that the official standing behind the Emperor's chair, dressed in a uniform of purple with silver braid, was the Prefect of the Court, who superintended the Emperor's table; that a gentleman, wearing as a senator a green swallow-tail dress with silver braid and a white vest, was the famous Dunau, the son of the Prince de Condé's *chef*, formerly in the same capacity with the Bourbons. Further, that the Emperor had his special dishes, that he ate very quickly, and often was absent-minded.

"For instance, after jam, salad!" whispered Talleyrand.

Pani Walewska looked at Napoleon, and could not help smiling. The Emperor was helping himself to the salad with a spoon covered with marmalade.

Duroc further spoke about the Emperor's habits, and laid stress on the fact that it was to be considered as a special favour to dine at the same table with the Emperor. Pani Walewska was very much interested, and when Duroc finished, she said with conviction: "Very unusual likings and customs. They do not seem, however, very strange to me, rather it would be difficult to believe that such a great man should have the same likings as we!"

"Naturally," put in Talleyrand. "After salad, cheese; and after cheese, partridges. Very original, and still more indigestible."

Duroc made a grimace.

"The Emperor considers food as a necessity—he cannot bear *les gourmets;* and I can assure you that M. de Périgord came here after having eaten abundantly at home."

Talleyrand had not time to answer, for the Emperor spoke to him, and Duroc added: "Pray, look! The Emperor reaches almost mechanically the dishes put before him. He puts his hand . . ."

"Into a sauce," interrupted Talleyrand.

"His Majesty is soiling his uniform," said Pani Walewska in a whisper to Duroc.

"No, Madame, he puts his hand on his heart!"

"The Prefect should call his Majesty's attention . . ."

"He cannot speak if he is not asked. Although the Emperor is unusually indisposed to-day. I assure you he suffers . . ."

"The Emperor?"

"He suffers, for he must be silent! You do not realise that amongst us he is the most bound by responsibility for every word, look, movement. He cannot forget for one moment that the whole world is looking at him. Believe me, I look at him constantly, and the more I read his thoughts the more surprised I am. Do you hear, Vincent is making an allusion to Silesia, and I am sure that the Emperor would rather give them the whole of Prussia, if instead of that official conversation he could exchange a few words with you—if he could express how much . . ."

"Then neither my prayers nor opinions carry any weight at all?" answered Pani Walewska.

"Yes, a great weight; for they wound, for they cause pain . . . but are they able to stop the throbbing of the heart? You seem to doubt! I promise, upon my honour, that I am but a very poor translator."

Here Duroc raised his voice. The Emperor turned and looked at Pani Walewska, who became crimson.

"You have the proof how his Majesty remembers you. Do you know what that look meant? Gratitude! Gratitude that you are kind enough to listen!"

"I am powerless to decline!"

"What cruel words! Then you think that that mighty ruler has no right to a moment of happiness?"

"Not at all! I think that his Majesty is much loved by the Empress."

"I do not doubt that you are sincere about it, although certain details ought to be known to you. It would be out of place to enter into those details. You must, however, remember this, that the Italian campaign, covering his Majesty with wreaths of laurel, has ruined his former happiness. . . . Then, does it seem to you improper that he wishes to conquer it now and to be happy? Do you not see that when you had that thought to go to Jablonna to meet his Majesty, that you were directed there by destiny? . . . Would you oppose it? If you could see

yourself, when kneeling on the step of the carriage, you pronounced your greeting that came from your heart! And now you refuse him even a kind look. . . ."

"My admiration is not lessened for one moment."

"I thank you from my whole heart for such words! They will be a cause of great joy to the Emperor."

"I am afraid they will be wrongly understood."

"Have confidence in me. I respect you too much to dare to change even one syllable."

"Notwithstanding that, I am afraid."

"Your fear here is out of place."

"Excellency!" whispered M. de Ségur behind Duroc's back.

The Marshal glanced at the Emperor, who rose from his chair.

The Emperor's example was followed by everybody, interrupting the eating of ices that had just begun.

Talleyrand, taking advantage of the opportunity, said a few malicious witticisms to Princess Jablonowska, who was in raptures over his wit.

"How just! Incomparable!"

"But painful, for the ices did honour not only to the *confiseur*, but also to our palates. Vincent hastened so much, that I am afraid his mouth is frozen. I advised him to ask for ices before soup! And do you know why the Emperor cannot suffer an underdone roast? Well, because the red colour reminds him of his own slaughtering. . . ."

"Excellent! I would be afraid to have you for a foe! And what do you think of Walewska?"

"I begin to be afraid."

"Then you suppose? . . ."

"Nothing at all, only it begins to be tedious. . . . The Emperor really has neither time to write love letters nor to remind himself of the lieutenant's love intrigues."

"Although to-day everything promised."

"I do not know, I do not think so! Exaggerated! You understand me, I would already have given up . . . If she were intelligent . . . but with women it is sometimes difficult. I have no reason to make obstacles, but I lack motives for co-operation."

"You calculate too much! Ah, it seems to me that M. Maret conducted her to the drawing-room."

"I congratulate, but do not envy!"

"The Prince of Bassano, however, enjoys great favours."

Talleyrand shrugged his shoulders contemptuously.

"Sometimes even such *parvenus* as he are necessary."

The Princess, not knowing Talleyrand's hatred towards Bassano, said evasively; "Excuse me, but it is so difficult to know what is true in the gossip—they said . . ."

"And rightly! The Emperor honours not only the Mameluke Rouston with his regard, but also caresses a horse. Although M. Maret has now at Court an implacable competitor, who is absolutely superior to him by his stupidity . . . Do you know who it is? Prince Bassano . . ."

"Implacable and incomparably *méchant!*"

"But sometimes truthful. Can I offer you my arm? We will go to persuade ourselves what M. Maret's protection will do for your sister-in-law. I am sure she will gain nothing, and even I would leave all to M. Maret."

"But all our hope is in you!"

Talleyrand nodded kindly, flattered by such a confidence in his cleverness, and having changed the subject of the conversation, introduced the Princess to the large drawing-room, in which the guests, imitating the Emperor, circulated in different directions, simulating quite awkwardly a freedom of movement and conversation, but in fact never losing sight, even for a moment, of Napoleon's green uniform.

If, however, the guests were not at their ease because they were anxious to be up to the tune of solemn questions and answers, or to catch every quiver of his Majesty's face, those who knew the Emperor noticed that he himself was still more uncertain, weary, and unnatural. He passed from one end of the room to another, began conversation suddenly and equally quickly stopped it, very often not having listened to the answer given to his question. Several times he seemed to go in the direction where Pani Walewska was standing with Prince Bassano, and when half-way retreated.

Those movements did not escape the notice of Prince Borghese's guests, and were the cause of whispers and unfavourable

conclusions, the rather that M. de Ségur was already waiting near the door, ready to accompany the Emperor to his carriage. The prevailing opinion began to be that the rumour of Napoleon's fancy for Pani Walewska was false, and most persons were pleased, but the members of the Walewski family sincerely sorry.

This impression was increased at the moment when M. d'Hédouville handed to the Emperor his hat and gloves. There was no doubt that Napoleon was going to leave presently.

In the meantime, the Emperor crumpled his hat nervously while he was talking with Malachowski and Prince Joseph, or, rather, was throwing them short sentences.

"It is war now! Your first care should be to remember about provisions for my army. Recruiting goes on slowly, very slowly! General Gauvion, notwithstanding all his sympathy with you, complains. I have spoken of this already, and I repeat it. I shall constitute a temporary Government."

"Sire!" answered Malachowski, hesitatingly.

"It is your duty to listen! I did not come here intending to be obliged to confess to you whether and where my cannons are in position. Pray, do not mix in politics."

Poniatowski bit his lips; Malachowski rubbed his high forehead; while Napoleon turned suddenly, and with firm steps went to Pani Walewska.

His movement was so sudden, so little justified, that even Duroc was confused.

The Emperor looked significantly at Maret, who withdrew, and Pani Walewska remained alone.

Napoleon was silent for a moment, as if searching for words; the Chamberlain's wife bent to make a curtsey.

Blood rushed to Bonaparte's face.

"Why do you torment me?" he asked violently.

"Sire!" stammered Pani Walewska with difficulty

"Yes, you torment me! You have taken peace from me, and now you avoid me. Why do you avoid me?"

"Your Majesty, how could I dare?"

"It cannot be thus any longer! I must have a talk with you."

"Sire!"

"Do not shelter yourself behind a wall of titles, you have

destroyed them yourself, you cannot retreat now! I am constantly thinking of you. To prove to you that I would like to satisfy every one of your wishes, I have to tell you that your brother has been promoted to the rank of colonel!"

"Colonel!" repeated Pani Walewska with hearty joy.

"You will see him in a few days," added Napoleon kindly.

"I thank you, Sire, and I assure you that you have distinguished one of your most devoted officers."

Napoleon smiled benevolently.

"I accept your thanks as a token of your future kindness. . . . I should be very pleased if I could see you so happy every day."

Here Napoleon lifted his head slightly, and having perceived, behind Pani Walewska, Duroc's beseeching look, shivered slightly, and, without answering Prince Borghese's bows, went forward to the door. When he was going to pass the threshold he stopped suddenly, waved his hand to the crowd of guests, and disappeared in the vestibule.

After the Emperor's departure there was silence in the room, followed by the uproar checked till now.

Pani Walewska was surrounded by a compact crowd of ladies and gentlemen. Compliments, embraces, assurances of friendship were showered not only on the Chamberlain's wife, but also on her husband, and even on Princess Jablonowska.

In the meanwhile, amid these marks of tender solicitude resounded the question: "What did the Emperor say to you?"

The question, so contagious, so intrusive, so unconsciously common to all those present, began at Anetka Potocka and Pani Moszynska, and ended with Talleyrand, Prince Borghese, Wybicki, and Malachowski; all were burning with the desire of knowing the conversation.

To all this Pani Walewska was so confused and enervated that she could not answer, and thereby excited further curiosity.

Pani Walewska's eyes were already filling with tears, her lips began to shiver and grow pale, when at last Madame de Vauban came to her help.

The Countess displayed such ability and presence of mind, that Pani Walewska did not notice when she was conducted out of the room, covered with her furs, and driven to the Blacha Palace, to Madame de Vauban's apartment.

Only here Pani Walewska burst into tears.

The Countess was moved.

"Dear child! We are alone here. Cry—it will do you good! I know by myself! Such a grave moment of life! And what did he tell you? Tell me, my dear child! Tell me!"

Pani Walewska, sobbing, repeated as exactly as she could the conversation with Napoleon.

Madame de Vauban listened attentively, and then she concluded: "There is destiny in all this! Have you not consulted a fortune-teller?"

"No."

"H'm! Pity; I am sure she would have foretold it to you."

Pani Walewska looked astonished.

"Certainly, my dear child. Especially Heliodora! I cannot forgive myself for not having taken you to her. She is astonishing. You must, you must see her!"

Pani Walewska shook her head negatively.

"I do not believe in sorcery!"

"Child! It is not sorcery, but power of reading the pages of human life! I do not believe in sorcery myself, but I was convinced. It was hard for me, for fate did not spare me bitterness. It is true that, knowing what I had to expect, I suffered awfully, but it passed soon! I became quieter; I accepted my destiny, and my life was bearable again. But not everyone is destined to suffer. I, perhaps, in spite of all, walked too long on roses—fate avenges itself now! But one who has suffered early in life is rewarded. You are the best proof of it. I doubted it yesterday, but I am sure of it to-day. One step more, and you will reach unattainable heights! One word will suffice to place at your feet the man who commands the nations!"

Pani Walewska trembled, her eyes became fiery.

"Never! Do you hear me! I prefer solitude, isolation, desertion. I shall not allow myself to be entangled in any intrigue! I know now you are plotting against me—you also! You wish to humbug me—you wish to push me into an abyss. But I shall not permit it—I shall use all my strength—I shall not surrender! I thought you were my friend; but now, when you speak to me like a foe, I know what drew you to me! You and the Marshal and the Princess, you all have one aim, to make

of me a sacrifice for your plans. But I shall know how to defend myself. You are pushing me to extremes, but you must be careful, else you will regret it! If my husband will not protect me, I know what I shall do. During the first reception, first review of the troops, I will fall at his feet, and aloud, in presence of all, I will tell him all the truth, and then, notwithstanding all his intentions, he will be obliged to respect his own majesty."

"But this is madness!"

"You are driving me to it!"

"Then you do not know Bonaparte."

"He is too great to be villainous! It will be as I said! And if this fails . . . there is another means. . . ."

Pani Walewska's voice broke down and changed into spasmodical weeping.

Madame de Vauban was moving her fan nervously. At last she made an effort to recover her calm, and said coolly: "I thought you were already a woman, but I see that you are only a capricious child, who does not understand its own good."

"I was taught to have only one name for shame."

The Countess laughed nervously.

"You go too far—your imagination carries you away."

"I see things better than ever."

"So you think. You have not the slightest idea of the Court, its ways and customs."

"These few days have been enough. . . ."

"I cannot believe."

"For you do not know what the Emperor asked me for!"

"Probably a *rendezvous*."

"And you find this natural, right?"

"It depends how one understands a *rendezvous*."

Pani Walewska looked astonished.

"It depends how one understands a *rendezvous*," repeated Madame de Vauban emphatically. "As for me, for instance, I do not see anything bad in it. A woman is always mistress of a situation—a woman knows how to keep an adversary in the limits of decency; on a woman depends everything. Can you deny it? You are puzzled by the Emperor's request. Then you do not understand that at the reception he cannot either distinguish you too much, or satisfy his own desire of talking

with you. Then you do not know that he is not allowed to be a man, who wishes to find an innocent pleasure in a conversation with a woman for whom he feels some liking? Only a *rendezvous* frees him from curious looks and ears, spying every one of his movements, every one of his words! But it is so simple!"

Pani Walewska did not answer.

Madame de Vauban felt her ascendency.

"You are surprised at my co-operation, at my joy on account of your success? Am I not right in it, thinking that you may have influence with the Emperor, that you can do lots of good, obtain many favours without any bad consequences to yourself? Look, the most prominent people care for one of his words, while you, from unreasonable scruples, push away his hand put out to you. Have you a right to do so? You think your husband will dare to tell you anything else?"

Pani Walewska rose from the chair and picked up her shawl.

"Why do you not answer?"

"I am going home!"

"I dare not detain you. Permit me to conduct you."

"No, thank you."

"I cannot let you go alone. If my company is not agreeable, I will ask Czosnowska."

"Very well, provided it be at once!"

Madame de Vauban bit her lips and rang for a servant.

"Ask Madame Czosnowska."

"Madame Czosnowska is entertaining guests; just now M. Talleyrand and M. Philippe de Ségur. . . ."

Madame de Vauban made a sign to the servant to leave them. She turned to Pani Walewska.

"Marie, these gentlemen came for you. You should show yourself kind . . . they can do very much with the Emperor. . . ."

"I asked you for a carriage."

Madame de Vauban stretched herself proudly.

"You shall have it," said she haughtily, and went away.

A long, tiring moment passed.

Pani Walewska came to a window, put her burning head on the frost-covered pane, and listened to the noise coming from the street; she was invaded by a kind of torpor of thought, a sudden insensitiveness. Her whole attention was concentrated

on the tintinabulation of bells and the squeaking of frozen axle-trees, on the tramping of horses and shouts of coachmen.

Under Pani Walewska's warm breath the ice covering the window-pane thawed, and she could now see the square of the Blacha Palace.

The Chamberlain's wife looked out with childish curiosity at the carriages, the Prince's footmen rushing from and to the carriages, the uniform of French gentlemen, the gaping crowd, ladies almost carried in footmen's arms, testifying to the numerous guests that crowded Madame de Vauban's drawing-room in Prince Joseph Poniatowski's palace.

It was already dark.

Pani Walewska turned away from the window in order to ring for a servant and to demand a carriage, when she found herself clasped by two soft, delicate arms.

Pani Walewska trembled. A quiet, agreeable laugh was heard.

"It is I—Fryne!"

"Czosnowska!"

"Yes, yes, my dear, dearest Madame! Excuse me, but I was standing behind you, and all at once something caught me by the heart. . . . Permit me to remain with you like this. . . . You are so good, so noble. What I would give if I could get the same strength!"

Pani Walewska, taken unawares by that outburst of tenderness, could not resist it.

In the meanwhile, Czosnowska cringed, nestled her shapely head on Pani Walewska's bosom, and made confidences of her weakness.

"If I were like you, the Prince would love me better! Undoubtedly! But I cannot, I do not know how! Sometimes I promise to myself to be proud, hard. And what happens? One of his looks, and my wish is gone. I am perishing for him. I suppose they have spoken to you about me—and, I am sure, badly too! Did I not wish to be a good girl? But it is so hard, so very hard!"

Czosnowska sighed.

"They call me Fryne! In the beginning it made me angry, but now it amuses me. For him everything! Have you loved already in your life? No? Is it possible to live without love?

As for me, I loved, and I do not love for the first time, but the Prince the best! Light? What for? Put the candelabra on the mantelpiece. I adore dusk!"

"The Countess promised me a carriage," said Pani Walewska, wishing to stop Fryne's volubility.

"It will soon be ready; they will let us know. You will permit me to accompany you? But why do you hasten? I could spend years and years with you! Are you not comfortable and quiet here?"

Czosnowska pulled Pani Walewska gently to a sofa, and when she was seated she bent her head, and with her delicate and soft hands began to caress Pani Walewska's hand.

"What a lovely hand you have, and what superb hair! What would I give if I had the same? My hair used to be quite abundant. I spoiled it by *papillotes*. What can I do? I must please. . . ."

Czosnowska laughed, showing two rows of white pointed teeth, and adorning her fresh face with a couple of coquettish dimples.

Pani Walewska made a movement of impatience. Fryne's caresses, her laughter, long and lazy looks, neglectfulness in her heavy movements, and finally the dizzying scent of musk with which Czosnowska was saturated, irritated the Chamberlain's wife, shocked her by some repelling sensuality.

"You spoke about a carriage."

"Then really we must be going?"

"I do not know about you. As for me, after the last conversation with the Countess, I have nothing more to do in this house."

"You are angry with the Countess?"

"It may be."

"Is it possible? She is so good, so noble! You would never believe. Well, formerly Pepi was in love with her, then with Krysia. . . . I was awfully afraid of Vauban; and imagine to yourself who made our acquaintance, who facilitated our first *rendezvous?* She! She became my friend, my confidante, my good spirit! Tell me, is it not beautiful, is it not romantic and noble on her part? She loved, but noticed that her lover grew cool, and through love for him has forgotten her own pain, her

own desertion, and wished only for his happiness. She breathes with his happiness, she lives by his happiness! Such is Vauban! And if you knew how she talks of you, how she loves you. . . ."

"It may be. . . ."

Czosnowska moved her head sadly

"They must have told you awful things of the Countess! I am sure of it; but it is all gossip! And they are angry, the most on account of her husband, M. de Vauban. Very elegant and decent man; one cannot wonder at what he has done. Pepi met Vauban at Bruxelles; then they expected that he would inherit from his uncle, and in presence of such a future M. de Vauban deemed it his duty not to stand in the way. And he acted very wisely, with dignity. He did not want to hinder his wife's future."

"And you call that duty?"

Czosnowska lifted her big convex eyes.

"Naturally. You understand, Pepi had some future. The late king thought seriously about inheritance! M. de Vauban was obliged!"

"There are different ideas! I shall not try to persuade you of those others. . . ."

"Truly, you seem to be hurt. . . . And I had no intention. As for you, it is quite different! I love you, admire and envy! Ah, how much I would give only for the feeling that the one for whose kind word the whole world is searching, bows to me, bends to me, is humble before me! It makes my skin creep! To tame such a lion, to subdue such a conqueror, to bind him with a ribbon of love, this is a most glorious victory! I would give half of my life for it!"

"But you love the Prince?"

"Very much indeed," acknowledged Fryne with simple frankness; "but the other is Napoleon! . . ."

"I had forgotten that reason! Good-bye! If the carriage is not ready I am going on foot!"

"Then you will not go to the drawing-room. There everybody wishes to see you! . . ."

"Good-bye!"

Czosnowska sighed submissively at such determination, and ordered the carriage, in which Pani Walewska returned home.

CHAPTER X

PANI WALEWSKA was very much surprised when next morning her chambermaid announced to her Chevalier de Bolesha's visit. The Chamberlain's wife could not recollect where she had seen the man, and supposing that his visit was prompted simply by politeness, ordered herself to be excused on account of indisposition. The servant, however, returned after a while with a note, and told her mistress that Chevalier de Bolesha must see her.

Pani Walewska, in the first moment, suspected that the Grand Marshal had chosen this man as his new ambassador, and was ready to send the bore away, when her look fell on the note handed to her. She grew confused. The note contained the laconic words, "In Gorayski's name, and at his urgent request."

Pani Walewska ordered the guest to be shown into the drawing-room next her boudoir, and having dressed hastily, came to him, trying to be calm.

Bolesha greeted her with a respectful bow.

"Your humble servant, Madame. I am Bolesha. I knew you when you were a baby. *Parole d'honneur!* years of friendship with your father . . ."

"I am very glad; pray be seated!" answered Pani Walewska hesitatingly.

"I beg of you to excuse my boldness, but, *parole d'honneur!* it seems to me that it was yesterday when I carried you in my arms! Good times, old times!"

"You came in the name . . .?" asked Pani Walewska, who very much disliked Bolesha's crimson face as well as his swollen, piercing eyes.

Bolesha breathed, drew the chair nearer Pani Walewska, and said quietly: "Precisely . . . Pan Stanislaus . . . in trouble,

Madame, on account of his good intentions! He is very, very dangerously wounded. Well, such a wound is not painful! *Parole d'honneur,* such a wound sometimes brings relief! Myself—how many times . . ."

"Then Pan Gorayski . . .?"

"Very bad, Madame!"

"Is he in danger?"

"In very, very great danger."

"Is he being well looked after?"

"Pan Kozietulski is constantly with him; the wound is very bad, but the question is not about the wound, Madame, you understand—the Emperor . . . Napoleon!"

"I do not know what you have in your mind. . . ."

Bolesha winked significantly, and began to pronounce slowly: "The Emperor is personally concerned in the affair! Governor Gauvion has been commanded to arrest Chevalier de Gorayski. It is so unfortunate! *Parole d'honneur,* any man who acted differently would have been a knave! Herceau avenged himself twice, for he not only stabbed him unexpectedly, but also accused him afterwards. The insult to his Majesty appeared at once! It is a serious insult to the Emperor. . . . The Court must enforce due respect, and our temporary Government is obliged to help in order to testify its loyalty. To speak shortly, Madame, the situation is awfully sad, and the only help lies in you!"

"In me! If I only could! I hope Pan Gorayski does not doubt, that remembering . . ."

"That's it, that's it!" interrupted Bolesha. "Here my boldness is justified! We went here and there seeking for ways to end the affair, but when everything was in vain, Pan Stanislaus took me by the hand and said: 'Go to her!'—he meant to you, Madame—'she will not abandon me—she will help me!' So he spoke, *parole d'honneur!* It made my heart bleed. . . ."

"If my intervention could do anything . . . I hope that Marshal Duroc will not refuse. . . ."

"Ah! not the Marshal, Madame, it must be directly to the Emperor!"

"But you know access to him is difficult."

"Well, I do not think it is for you, Madame," answered Bolesha with a stupid smile.

Pani Walewska dropped her head.

"You are mistaken."

"I think, however, that the Emperor will not refuse you an audience."

"It is out of the question to think of that."

"*Ergo,* Pan Gorayski's hope in you was useless."

"Not at all. I will do all in my power. I will speak to the Grand Marshal and to M. de Périgord. . . ."

"H'm . . . yes, certainly! But those roads are too long. *Parole d'honneur,* if you would permit me, Madame, I could arrange an audience for you."

"I thank you very much, but I will not take advantage of your intervention."

Bolesha rose heavily.

"Then what shall I say to Gorayski?"

"What you have heard."

"You will excuse me, Madame, but, knowing his inner sentiments, I do not think that I shall have the courage to disappoint him so painfully! It seems that you do not realise in what peril he is. He might be shot . . . he might become the victim of vengeance."

Pani Walewska grew irritated by Bolesha's voice.

"I shall be very sorry!"

"Madame! *parole d'honneur,* this is not sufficient! He must be protected; it is almost your duty. There will be inquiries . . . what was the origin . . . and the result will not be pleasant for the Chamberlain. Poor Gorayski counted on a different sort of protection, but as his feeling does not find sympathy, then, *parole d'honneur,* he must consider his peril."

Pani Waleswka shivered.

"You are too bold in your conjectures. I respect Pan Gorayski as my brother's friend."

"Evidently, evidently! I do not venture to doubt that brotherhood, provided it produces some result."

"We shall see. And now you must excuse me. . ."

Bolesha smiled ironically, bowed to the floor, and began to withdraw to the door.

"I am your servant! We expected . . . but things have turned out quite differently. My respects to you, Madame! I hope that the Chamberlain will be kind. Your most humble servant!"

Pani Walewska, hearing her husband's name, stopped Bolesha.

"What do you propose to do?"

"Nothing, Madame! To knock! to rescue the youth from peril."

"But what can the Chamberlain do?"

Bolesha lifted his eyebrows.

"Ah, very much indeed! We must try him. Oho! Pan Anastazy, *parole d'honneur,* has influence. His word carries weight, and he will say that word; for although he may be angry with Gorayski . . . but he must be careful of people's tongues! . . ."

"In a few words, you wish to persuade my husband that his dignity requires him to consider Gorayski's affair as his own?"

Bolesha protested with well-played sincerity.

"The idea, Madame! How could I dare? Never! I shall only try to find help, and for that I shall use means. . . ."

"And if I consent to speak to the Emperor?"

"Madame, eternal gratitude! And not mine alone: Kozietulski, Krasinski, and twenty others! Not to speak of Gorayski. . . ."

"I must, however, consider."

"I have the honour to say that this is impossible."

"In that case . . ."

"Perhaps till evening. It is impossible any longer."

"You are too urgent. Even if I decided to see the Emperor, I could not do it as soon as that."

"It is true, Madame, although I imagined otherwise. . ."

"Let us not speak about that any more," interrupted Pani Walewska. "This evening you shall receive my answer. In the meanwhile assure Pan Gorayski that his friendship with my brother will prompt me to do anything that is in my power."

"I am greatly obliged. If only an audience, Madame. *Parole d'honneur,* the Emperor will give in, and for your sake even grant a riband to Pan Stanislaus. Most humble! Pray forgive my quick words, but from good heart, from honest thought—I would not like to hurt the honoured Pan Anastazy!"

Bolesha saluted several times and sneaked out of the room, leaving Pani Walewska alone.

The Chamberlain's wife had hardly time to think over the demand and to appreciate properly the behaviour of Gorayski, who from a hopeless and melancholy admirer had suddenly changed into a refined *intrigant*, ready even to commit a baseness if only he could disentangle himself from a difficulty with the authorities, when unexpectedly her husband appeared at the same door through which Gorayski's messenger had passed.

Pani Walewska became confused, in spite of herself, feeling that she had almost been entrapped by her kind thoughts, almost been determined that for the sake of assuring for herself peace she would be forced to beg for Gorayski's pardon.

The Chamberlain, however, did not notice his wife's confusion; he approached her respectfully, deposited a kiss on her forehead, and asked solicitously: "How do you feel, my dear, after yesterday?"

"Thank you, very well!"

"I am so glad, so glad. We were all afraid of emotion. I wished to see you earlier, but I did not wish to fatigue you; then they told me that Bolesha was here. I preferred not to interfere. . . . You are looking marvellously well. Yesterday's dinner made an impression, decisive—enormous. Permit me to kiss you! We are placed, you understand, placed! I must excuse myself for my previous doubts! You have shown such political tact that I have no words. . . . They all speak of you. Even Gutakowski has lost his eloquence, and being surprised said: '*Spiritus flat, ubi vult!*' Well, they were obliged to acknowledge that you have surpassed all expectations. Yesterday's dinner has fixed us; it has strengthened the foundations put by me, and the partisans of Dombrowski are moved; even Malachowski has forgotten about his Limited Diet, and asked permission to pay us a visit!"

Pani Walewska listened to her husband's joyful confidences, unable either to share them or to answer.

The Chamberlain rapped his snuff-box noisily, winked significantly at his wife, and passing his hand from his right shoulder across his chest to his left hip, he said emphatically—

"Before all here! Do you understand?"

"No! What do you mean?"

"Here!" repeated the Chamberlain, repeating the movements of the hand. "Here it must be!"

"But I do not understand!"

"The grand riband of the Legion!" explained the Chamberlain with a slight reproach in his voice.

"Grand riband?"

"Unquestionably! and then we will think about other honours."

"Yes, yes, certainly."

"They will wish to have you as a lady-in-waiting on the Empress, although I do not know if we should accept. They say it is a great honour, and that privileges . . . well, we shall consider; but you must mention Ksawery! He is not very clever, but we must take care of our family and name in him."

"Yes, yes," repeated Pani Walewska mechanically, making up her mind to tell her husband about her difficult position, and about the snares set for her.

The Chamberlain was not satisfied with his wife's monosyllables, but tried to preserve good humour.

"I admired you yesterday! I agreed that Vauban is changed in our favour. She was obliged to yield like the others! Poniatowski pretends to be stiff even yet, only very awkwardly! He is now sitting downstairs and waiting. Let him wait!"

"Prince Joseph is in our house?"

The Chamberlain laughed good-humouredly.

"Better ask, my dearest, who is not and was not here! Look through the window! A procession since morning! I ordered that you should not be troubled! Bolesha was allowed, for he said that he had some errand from Vauban for you."

"Bolesha from the Countess?"

"So he told me, and I let him in. For, my dearest, you have your own will! I did not want to interfere in your feminine affairs, but I did not see any reason why you should receive everybody. The rooms are full. Who is not and who was not here? Poniatowski, the Potockis, Maret, the Lubienskis, Sobolewski, Talleyrand, Corvisart, de Ségur, General Vincent, Radziwil, Duroc, Méneval, Prince Ornano . . ."

"Prince Ornano?" repeated Pani Walewska.

"Bah! Crowds. Sometimes I do not know who is greeting me. Jablonowska consoles herself with them."

"I am grateful to you—I do not wish to see anybody. Excuse me; tell them anything you like, provided they leave me alone and cease to care about me."

"You mean that they should keep at a respectful distance! Naturally! I thought the same. By-the-by, Malachowski came and begged me to let him see you, and he is waiting. You must receive him."

"But I am not disposed to such an honour."

"There is no honour in that—only politics. I must be careful with Malachowski—he has means—he can influence different people! You must receive him. Moderation! Let him know that although we do not need him we do not repulse him, we do not draw him away. We are glad of a *rapprochment,* but without haste! I am sure you will know how. I will send him, then. . . ."

"But I—with the Speaker of the Diet?"

"The honour is not on your side! Let me kiss you! Should he bother you too much, I will interrupt him."

Pani Walewska could not excuse herself from receiving Malachowski, for her husband, notwithstanding his apparent submissiveness, did not accept her excuses, did not permit her any explanation, and went out to introduce the venerable and aged speaker.

Pani Walewska could not even say a word of welcome, so perplexed was she.

Malachowski, however, did not seem to pay attention to the Chamberlain's wife's evident distraction, and said first: "I took the liberty of troubling you, Madame, but I daresay you will excuse exceptional circumstances—very exceptional indeed. . . ."

Pani Walewska pointed at an armchair.

Malachowski looked imperceptibly at the retreating Chamberlain, then sat down heavily, and dropped his head.

A long silence unbearable to Pani Walewska followed. She realised that it was her part to speak, but could not find any words. Her whole attention was concentrated on the Speaker's thin withered figure, on his wrinkled forehead, his tightly closed lips, on the expression of solemnity emanating from

every movement, on the brightness shining not only from Malachowski's white hair, but also from his forehead, from every fold of his grey swallow-tail coat, from the large tie round his neck, from every vein looking through the skin on his long, bony hands.

Malachowski did not in that close contact lose any of Pani Walewska's high respect. On the contrary, he commanded a still greater esteem, for he brought with him the awe of his merits—he seemed to bear some immense sorrow.

A long, painful moment passed. Malachowski raised his eyes, and looked at Pani Walewska kindly but sadly. She blushed slightly. Malachowski smiled benevolently.

"Madame, you must be surprised at my visit."

"I am honoured."

"Exceptional circumstances, exceptional. Your father was a worthy citizen, worthy. . . . I came hoping that you had inherited your father's virtues. I came convinced that you will not deceive the expectations we have founded on you."

"I—I—I do not understand!"

Malachowski made a movement of impatience.

"Very delicate matter. But consider my age; permit me to be frank!"

"Pray, be so!"

Malachowski cleared his throat, and began slowly.

"Destiny chose that the man in whose hands is the fate of Europe has conceived for you a sentiment. . . . Therefore, although it may seem to you somewhat discreditable, we must count with that sentiment, we must have recourse to it, and find advantages in it for our future."

Pani Walewska was seized by a nervous shiver. Malachowski did not notice it, and continued with a bitter smile: "Yes, Madame, we have come to that! You see what is going on! Napoleon fired the minds of men; Napoleon came here like a thunderbolt, ruined the building of our calculations; he accomplished unforeseen deeds, he made a plaything of us—of politics; turned our country into army stores, into recruiting barracks. We cannot resist him; we are not strong enough to do it, and the majority of us do not understand that he is the bitterest foe of our poor existence. We cannot follow him, for

he has given us no guarantee that his intentions towards us are honest. He asks, he demands, he commands, but in exchange he does not promise anything, he does not even try to give us any illusion. Not one positive word, not one! . . . Therefore it is your duty to make him say, to force him to pronounce that word. . . ."

"I—I?" whispered Pani Walewska, astonished.

"Yes, you, Madame! You have influence; you have better means than all our prayers, our complaints, our requests. . . . It is a painful and humiliating way for us—pray notice that I do not say this with a purpose of hurting you—but we must use even such a one. Your common sense is a sufficient guarantee to me that you will use your influence quietly, that you will save appearances. For only appearances are left to us. Do everything by your own impulse, by all the feeling which forbids you to look indifferently at the bottom of the abyss towards which Napoleon is leading us. He is strong enough to turn us from it, and you are strong enough to make him do so."

Malachowski stopped suddenly, and looked sadly towards Pani Walewska.

"You are silent!"

Pani Walewska tightened her hand around the arm of her chair.

"You do not like that beautiful mission; you prefer not to put such hard conditions on your ruler; you prefer the more modest but also safer position of an imperial favourite to that perilous rôle of a Judith? . . . You are not either prepared to be Esther, nor able to rule like Dalilah? I understand you are satisfied with such affection as La Vallière's, without Pompadour's ambition. But this being the case, if you do not wish to act, at least do not hinder, do not spare a kind word—remember the soil on which you were born—remember your father's ashes. . . ."

Malachowski breathed heavily.

"You do not answer!"

Pani Walewska lifted her head with an effort, and murmured quietly: "At least do not mention my father's name."

"I did not wish to hurt you."

Pani Walewska sprang from her seat, her eyes flaming.

"You repeat that again, but you do not hesitate, nevertheless, to make the most insulting insinuations to me, to slander my good name with abominable suppositions! For whom do you take me, sir? Have I given you any reason to suppose me the mistress of any man whatever?"

Malachowski was disconcerted.

"You will excuse me, but the sympathy you were able to win . . ."

"Is evidently a curse of my peace, of my life, for it exposes me to such an insult as yours, sir. What do you want of me? Where do you wish to lead me?"

"But the Emperor?"

"I told him I have a husband, and I repeat the same thing to you. His pursuit made me indignant, filled me with fear. But till now I believed that . . . that . . . those whom I have been taught to respect, would not help him; but I see that I was mistaken, that I was blind. There are no means of protecting a woman who, unfortunately for her, falls into the net of Court calculations. You tried to guess what lot I preferred. Then I tell you, sir: the one which would permit me to be as far as possible from your plans, your splendour, your influences and your world! May God forgive you the wrong you did me!"

A spasmodic weeping seized Pani Walewska by the throat.

Malachowski rose quickly and took her by the hand.

"Forgive me! Do not accuse me!" he said respectfully. "Have consideration for my poor, sorrowful grey head. I believe entirely in the purity of your thoughts and deeds, in the nobleness of your soul. I see that you are pure. I have the fullest respect for you. I might be your grandfather. Do not think evil of me. They said—and people are merciless! Do you forgive me? You are not angry with me?"

Pani Walewska smiled through her tears.

"It was so much more painful because it was you. . . ."

"I withdraw every one of my words. There is such an entanglement of facts. And they said much about you. Well—and looking on you there, it would be no wonder if even such a great man should bend his head before you! Do not be gloomy. I offer you my friendship. I am proud of your honest answer, and although you rebuked me very hardly, yet I am

joyful. What a shameful slander! I wonder whence it came, and if you knew what subtle intrigues have been made. I must be frank and tell you that, having seen you conversing with the Emperor, I thought it was a certainty."

Pani Walewska, moved by Malachowski's fatherly sincerity, told him about her first meeting with the Emperor.

Malachowski listened attentively, and when she had finished, began to ask her many questions, and thus learned all the details concerning her meeting with the Emperor, conversations with Duroc, and the whole snare set for her reputation.

With the progress of the narrative, Malachowski's face grew more and more serious.

"Therefore the suppositions of the Emperor's affection were not exaggerated?"

"Unfortunately not; therefore I appeal to your influence, and I hope you will not refuse me your help. . . ."

"Help? But I see quite another route for me."

Pani Walewska looked at him frightened.

Malachowski said persuasively: "Listen to me. When I came here, I feared only one thing, and this was that the news about the Emperor's attentions to you was exaggerated. I doubted whether he thought as much of you as they said. After your noble rebuke, I conceived a respect for you, and I understand also that I was mistaken in regard to the attentions; but now I come to the conclusion that my request would have more importance, and would be followed by surer results than I supposed, for they have a guarantee in the purity of your character."

"Then you also . . "

"Yes," answered Malachowski hastily. "I see that calculations founded on you may bring much good to our country; you will be able to obtain that for which we were begging in vain: Napoleon's word! the Emperor's word! You will obtain it—you must obtain it! Do not interrupt me. There are no ties strong enough, there are no oaths sacred enough, not to be broken in such a case. Your aim is great! sublime! By breaking your ties, by deliberately accepting the title of a favourite, you will deserve the gratitude and respect of your countrymen! Your downfall will be your exaltation—all the

purer because until now you had neither paltry ambition nor a vile thought!"

Pani Walewska glanced at Malachowski with a burning look.

"And my good name, husband, family?"

"It will be an honour to your husband; you will become dearer to your family; you will yourself be conscious of your sacrifice; you will give yourself unextinguishable satisfaction. . . ."

Pani Walewska pressed her burning temples with her hands.

"Why do you speak like that to me? Why do you ruin the rest of my peace? I am afraid of that! You are all mistaken! I have no idea of diplomacy and politics! I am afraid of him! Do you hear me? I am afraid of him! Let me live in my solitude! You have other, more worthy women. I cannot do anything with him. . . . He crushes me with his look. . . ."

Malachowski took her by the hand.

"Do you believe that I would like to see my own child happy, that I would like to save her from every shadow of sorrow?"

Pani Walewska nodded affirmatively.

"Then remember that had you been my own daughter, I would not hesitate to speak in the same manner."

The tears burst from Pani Walewska's eyes. Malachowski bent to her respectfully.

"Noble tears! But they are rather due to the situation in which our country is, which forces us to walk on such roads. I admire your pride, and it costs me much to persuade you. What horrible times we live in! It would be better if Napoleon had not come here; we should have had fewer illusions, but also fewer disappointments. *Circulus viciosus* of words, and only one certainty—that we have to follow him, to perish for him!"

Pani Walewska wiped her tears and asked nervously: "Then what have I to do?"

Malachowski's face brightened; his big grey eyes turned to Pani Walewska with an expression of admiration.

"May God reward your sacrifice; let Him inspire you, that you may become our good spirit!"

"What then? I must know!"

"Before all things, secrecy! No one must even suspect that

your yielding does not come from your own feeling. Do you understand?—nobody! I and Wybicki will watch and protect you as much as is in our power—but you must be silent! The Court, your husband, your family, must not guess anything. . . ."

Pani Walewska laughed bitterly.

"Ha! ha! Consequently, I have to throw myself into the Emperor's arms. I have to become . . ."

"Slowly, dear Madame! Let us talk more quietly. If you succeed in getting one word only from Napoleon, you will accomplish more than Wybicki in ten years' efforts—than all the blood poured out by the Polish legions in Italy! We want only one word!"

"But in order to get that word one must have an opportunity."

"But you shall have it sooner than you expect! Wybicki told me that the intrigues of the Court have delivered you into Mme. de Vauban's hands. . . . Therefore she will facilitate your access; you have only to yield. The Countess sees great advantages for herself in all this, and she will not spare you her instructions. Bear with her for a time; she has experience. About the rest Wybicki will tell you."

Malachowski breathed with difficulty. "That is all!"

"Yes, that is all," repeated Pani Walewska.

"Pray remember, at every moment of your life you have in me a most devoted friend."

"I wish to be alone," stammered Pani Walewska with difficulty.

Malachowski shook her by the hand and went out.

Pani Walewska stood for a while motionless, as if petrified. Suddenly she shivered, a cramp seized her throat and stopped her breath. She felt that she was choking, and making a desperate effort, she rushed to the window, opened it, and began to cool her heaving bosom with a stream of icy air.

Little by little she was relieved; but in the meanwhile she felt that a wild, incomprehensible mood was taking hold of her. She laughed to herself, and her laughter became more and more excited by the remembrance of Malachowski's every word. She laughed at his reasons as well as at her own fears.

Pani Walewska looked on the courtyard of her palace, where numerous servants wearing liveries were coming and going, and

she laughed at the thought that those servants perhaps would put on green uniforms with gold lace; she laughed at the frost shining on the window panes, at the steely clouds with silvery edges produced by the sun, and at the sparrows bathing in the snow.

The Chamberlain's hoarse voice interrupted her.

Pani Walewska listened with surprise as he preached about precautions against catching cold. She was surprised that her husband ordered a servant to close the window and make a fire at once.

"You are very imprudent!" scolded the Chamberlain, rubbing his hands. "There is a frost, and you are at the open window. B-r-r-r! How cold!"

"Here?"

"I shiver all over! Pray come to the other room. What thoughtlessness! You do not care for your health! H'm! and what about Malachowski? What did he say? He cringes, eh?"

Pani Walewska smiled.

"He bent! I was sure of it! It was hard for the Speaker to bend his neck! Ha! ha! And how effusive he was to me! Friend! But we have old accounts. Walewski has a good memory. He knows how to explain the thing to the Emperor. Why do you laugh? It is no laughing matter! I shall not share my power with any one! At every hour I expect serious propositions from Talleyrand. . . ."

Pani Walewska laughed louder. The Chamberlain lifted himself on his tiptoes and made a grimace.

"Pray stop that laughter. It looks as if you did not care for the position which is awaiting us."

"Us?"

"H'm! naturally, us. Well, I hope you have also noticed that his Majesty likes you? I cannot blame him for that. We can obtain very, very much—if you are intelligent."

Pani Walewska became suddenly serious, and asked: "Then you give your consent?"

"Consent? There is no question about consent! The Emperor would like to win me, that is evident. He wishes to have Walewski, he wishes to have the husband's confidence; *tandem*, he considers Pani Walewska also. He thinks that as a

wife she has influence. *Ergo,* our diplomacy should be completed by our mutual efforts. We both listen, and we both remember not to be put off with trifles. Before all, here . . . you understand? The grand riband! Without the riband I am not going to give my name! Why are you looking at me so strangely? Riband, I said!"

Pani Walewska shrugged her shoulders.

"I am going to Mme. de Vauban!"

That sudden turn astonished the Chamberlain.

"Now?"

"Yes."

"Well . . . but the dinner? We have the Princess and Ksawery with his wife. Probably one of the generals will stay. . . ."

"I must go!"

"Why must you?" protested the Chamberlain, mincing after his wife, who went to a mirror and began hastily to put her hair in order.

"Then I said that you were not well . . . and should they see your carriage! Although we do not need to count with everybody. . . ."

"It is indifferent to me; I must go to Mme. de Vauban!"

The Chamberlain looked askance at his wife, but being struck by the decision in her voice, he smiled as if he had guessed.

"A . . . a! that is different. Go, dearest. Should you meet any one there, perhaps Prince Bassano, trust him more than anybody else. Say a word to him! It will come easily to you . . . a woman's ambition, that her husband should not be neglected! You know, Legion! Wybicki will be in a rage!"

Pani Walewska got rid of her husband with a few words, and rushed to the vestibule.

At first the Chamberlain was displeased at his wife's independent will, but, after a little thinking, he smiled mysteriously to himself, and went to the drawing-room to do the honours of his house.

Princess Jablonowska attacked him at once.

"How is Marie? . . What? Malachowski! What has he said? . . ."

"Nothing!"

"Nothing? I think you could have confidence in me. Davoust came. It is significant! Marie should come to see him. Davoust is going to command the new army corps. Davoust is an important man. He has been made a Prince! Even Murat is afraid of him. Imagine, Murat! I have heard that from M. d'Hédouville! Persuade her to show herself."

"Impossible. She is not at home."

"What? Is it possible?"

"She was obliged to go to Vauban. . . ."

"Obliged?" repeated the Princess in a strange voice, and, not listening to her brother's further explanations, she hastened to the sofa on which Pani Moszynska was displaying her yellow dress.

"Is she still suffering? How sorry I am!"

The Princess leaned towards her friend and said mysteriously: "*Ma chère!* you know, everything for you! Were it possible, I would conduct you to our dear Marie! but . . . it is useless!"

"You said useless, dear Princess?"

The Princess covered her mouth with a fan.

"She is not there! . . . She was obliged . . ."

"O . . . bliged?" stammered out Pani Moszynska.

". . . To Vauban! Probably to consult her about dresses. Vauban has taste! And should she go to Paris . . ."

Pani Moszynska grew crimson; her lips began to tremble nervously; her eyes threw uneasy glances around the room.

"Now you know, my dearest!"

"Naturally! Naturally! It cannot be otherwise! I must be going home! It is late . . . very late . . . permit, dear Princess . . . Marie will regret."

"Yes, I understand. Permit me to kiss you."

The ladies kissed each other and separated.

The Princess sat down beside Pani Sobolewska, Pani Moszynska stopped to exchange a few words with Rautenstrauch. . . . The drawing-room became suddenly animated; it was filled up with whispers; and then the guests began suddenly to leave the Chamberlain's hospitable mansion, in front of which then resounded orders given to the coachmen: "To Blacha Palace!" Pani Moszynska gave it first; it was repeated by Pani

Sobolewska, Lubienska, and Gutakowska, and rendered with the same precision by Marshal Davoust, by M. de Ségur and M. Flahaut, the Prince de Berg's favourite aide-de-camp.

The Chamberlain could not understand why all his guests went away so quickly, leaving him alone with Princess Jablonowska, but as he was tired he was glad he could rest.

Therefore, having taken leave of his last guest, he threw himself into the armchair, took snuff, and smiled significantly at his sister.

"Well . . . you have seen? Imagine! They reckon on us! Hey! You say? Nothing? Now we must think over and talk over . . . I am glad you are staying; we will consult each other. Pray be seated. . . ."

The Princess looked round uneasily.

"Thank you, it is too late! I promised to call on Princess Radziwil."

"H'm! but just now we have a moment to ourselves—there is the question about the decisive step. We have everything in our favour; we must make a proposition."

"Yes, yes!" said the Princess negligently, gathering into a bag her things scattered on a table.

"Only the first words must not be pronounced by me! They ought to begin! The most decent thing for me will be a riband . . . here! A snuff-box—very well, I say nothing against it—but first of all, a riband. They give, I thank them; there is some exchange of words and congratulations, declaration, conference. . . . Do you say anything? Nothing! By-the-by, the treaty must remain secret for a certain time. I give a ball. The Emperor comes; we invite the most noble people. The Emperor has a long talk with me—general movement, whispers, conjectures; and the next day a document, publication, installation *stante pede!* Did you speak?"

"No, only . . ."

"It cannot be otherwise. It must be done decently and with form. That was formerly the way in Paris and Vienna. Colonna Walewski agrees, accepts plans; but Colonna Walewski is not a paltry aide-de-camp, a soldier who dreams about epaulettes, about the feathered hat of a general. If Colonna Walewski needs Napoleon, then Napoleon needs Colonna Walewski. And

they will supplement each other—they will help each other. For Colonna Walewski is for himself, and Napoleon for himself!"

"Excuse me, Anastazy. . . ."

"What! what! Do you think otherwise?"

"Not at all, only the Radziwils are waiting."

"Let them wait! Soon all of them must wait. . . ."

"Naturally! But I must be going . . . you will rest; you deserve it. You are tired, and I must be going."

"But you cannot go; you must receive in Mary's absence. Should any one come . . ."

"I assure you nobody will come. . . ."

The Chamberlain made a grimace.

"What, nobody? Why not? I am sure that Prince Borghese, the Emperor's brother-in-law . . . only it is not an honour at all for Colonna Walewski! You remember how the late king called me? 'Wales,' simply 'Wales.'"

"I remember very well; but I must be going. I will send a footman for news. I am sure there will be some!"

Before the Chamberlain could protest again, his sister rushed to the vestibule, put on her fur cloak hastily, and hurried to the carriage waiting for her. The Chamberlain remained alone in his armchair, stunned by his sister's sudden departure, excited by his own thoughts. He saw himself on the threshold of his dreams; the power which he had desired for so many years was at last coming to him—he almost felt it in his hands. He was very ambitious; to such a degree that, on account of the ambition, he hid his plans for years—did not let anybody know them. He was hurt that, notwithstanding his right, he got nothing except the office of Chamberlain; that at the former Court they considered him only as an elegant courtier, and did not ask him to stand with others at the head of the Government.

The Chamberlain half closed his eyes. These bitter reminiscences were smothered by the brilliancy of to-morrow.

Baptiste's voice interrupted his ambitious dreams of rule. The Chamberlain made a movement of impatience.

"What? Dinner? I do not want any! Cover my legs; a cup of *bouillon!*"

"But it is dark here!"

"Then why do they not light up? Do it at once! All the lights!"

"All the lights? . . ."

"Yes, I said all the lights! Do you hear me? Immediately!"

Baptiste shrugged his shoulders, and said negligently: "Very well, sir, although there is nobody here."

"They are all to be lighted! Understand? Cover my legs!"

The Chamberlain grumbled for some time longer, then he fell into the torpor of an old, used-up man. The only thing that seemed to occupy him now was the monotonous tick-tack of a clock, and he would ask every little while about the time, and then he would say in a feeble voice: "Has her ladyship come back?"

Baptiste would then go out to the vestibule and report indifferently: "No, sir, she has not!"

After such an answer the Chamberlain sighed and listened again to the tick-tack.

About midnight he grew more uneasy.

"Baptiste, has her ladyship come back?"

"No, sir; they are waiting with supper."

"Very well, but . . . she must have come back."

"I inquired a little while ago. I ordered them to let me know at once."

"You should have sent to the Blacha Palace."

"I did send, and Princess Jablonowska told me to make you easy. . . ."

"Very well, then! If the Princess . . . Something must have happened! For, you see, some important changes are prepared. . . . Her ladyship is surrounded; they wish to win me through her. Rub me well with whisky! I am weak, and to-morrow I may need much strength, very much strength. . . ."

CHAPTER XI

MADAME DE VAUBAN was very much surprised when Pani Walewska was announced to her, but guessing instinctively some important change, she tried to forget the unpleasant separation on the previous day, and received her with all heartiness.

Pani Walewska was surprised and abashed by her cordiality. On her way she had planned how to ask the Countess's forgiveness for her unfriendliness, and to justify herself by an unusual nervousness, while Madame de Vauban purposely avoided all explanations, and conducted the conversation in such a manner as if between herself and Pani Walewska there were no cross words whatever.

"I am infinitely glad you came! I am so lonely. You are looking beautiful! Did you make many calls to-day?"

"No, I was not disposed to."

"I believe you, for it is tedious."

"Yes, and then, after yesterday . . ."

"You felt tired. *Chère Marie!* How nice of you to remember me!"

"I deemed it necessary. . . ."

"Let me kiss you! Good-hearted, noble, worthy, always—always!"

"You abash me. On the contrary, yesterday . . ."

"You were, as always, my dear friend, for whom I would sacrifice everything."

"Permit me!" interrupted Pani Walewska, feeling that she must justify herself. "Yesterday I was childish and thoughtless, and I do not know myself whether I can atone for the fault I committed."

To that unexpected turn Madame de Vauban did not know

what to answer. She was afraid of Pani Walewska's excuses, for she thought that they would lead up to her countrified and antiquated ideas that had nothing in common with the great world in which the Countess moved, when suddenly she heard something about fault—almost regret.

"What, what, my dearest?" inquired Madame de Vauban hesitatingly.

Pani Walewska blushed, dropped her head, and said quietly: "It was a childishness on my part—momentary irritation."

Madame de Vauban beamed. She drew Pani Walewska to her, and began to kiss her.

"*O chérie!* What an emotion you caused me! One must love and admire you! I am wholly yours. I did not wish to let you know, although I suffered. To wish happiness for the beloved person and to see that she pushes it away wilfully, is, you will agree, dreadful. For if you would listen to me, if you would trust me . . ."

"Pray speak. . . ."

Madame de Vauban grew confused. That simple answer, declining all discussion, for which Madame de Vauban was so well prepared, disturbed all her devices.

"Well . . . that is to say . . . you know . . . the Emperor . . ."

"What about the Emperor?"

"He fancies you very much."

"Then what more?"

"More? . . . more? He will be very happy if you would grant him . . ."

"A *rendezvous?*" interrupted Pani Walewska quickly.

"Well, there is nothing bad . . ."

"Naturally."

"Then . . . then . . . you would consent?"

"You say yourself that there is nothing bad."

The Countess turned her brown eyes inquisitively on Pani Walewska.

"Marie! There is something the matter with you."

Pani Walewska laughed.

"Ah! Why such a supposition?"

"I could not tell you, but hearing you talk like that . . ."

"Is it not according to your ideas?"

"Entirely; but if one compares it with your former . . ."

"I was childish."

"Then," said Madame de Vauban after a reflection, trying in vain to guess the cause of the change in Pani Walewska, "one might make Duroc understand that in case . . ."

"Yes, one may," said Pani Walewska shortly. The Countess did not know what to say. The mood of the Chamberlain's wife, although it corresponded with her most earnest wishes, although it rejoiced her, troubled her and also aroused a suspicion.

Pani Walewska was pulling at her handkerchief.

"Did you send me that . . . that . . . Bolesha?" asked she suddenly.

The Countess rushed from her seat.

Now she guessed, now she understood the cause of the change in Pani Walewska.

"Yes, I did, my dearest! I know how much you care for him. I knew you would help him out of his difficulties, that you would not lose an opportunity! He deserves it! Everybody speaks well of Chevalier de Gorayski. I suppose that you were struggling with yourself, but he deserves that struggle. Your word will undoubtedly carry weight with the Emperor."

And Madame de Vauban, having got rid of all doubts, displayed all her eloquence in order to strengthen Pani Walewska's determination.

The Chamberlain's wife listened to her arguments, trying not either to contradict her or to acknowledge that she was right. Those arguments, however, were short, because of guests who began to arrive. The Countess, guessing that she must immediately take advantage of Pani Walewska's disposition, decided to act at once.

"Marie," said she tenderly, "I must go to the drawing-room. I suppose you would prefer to stay here?"

"On the contrary, I will go with you."

"You are right. I admire you—I am proud of you. As you have already decided, better not torment yourself with gloomy thoughts—better to advance than retreat."

"Certainly!"

"Then, should there be an opportunity to-day?"

Pani Walewska paled slightly.

"You say an opportunity?"

"Permit me, dear child! The Emperor is a very whimsical fellow. As it seems, he is extremely busy. Yesterday he wanted to give up the dinner. Duroc persuaded him with much difficulty. Therefore one does not know whether he will have time to receive you. At any rate, do not bother yourself —leave that to me; I will arrange everything. I tell you he is an odd fellow. You must be very careful with him. He has not chivalrous manners, but he will undoubtedly acquire them through your influence."

In the drawing-room a swarm of guests closely surrounded Pani Walewska, complimenting her and trying to win her attention.

Pani Walewska received everything coolly, answering the most ardent effusions with indifferent smiles, wondering to herself whence she got her irony, coolness, and composure.

Her indifferent answers not only did not cool down the curiosity of Madame de Vauban's guests, but excited it to a higher degree, for that assurance and that indifference were considered as the best proof that Pani Walewska had reached those heights on which it was permitted to her to play with M. de Ségur's bows, Marshal Davoust's compliments, and all the influence of Warsovian society, and even of the members of the temporary Government.

The Princess Jablonowska was beaming with joy, and having caught Madame de Vauban in a corner of the room, she said: "Dear Countess, I know what gratitude we owe you! You are a magician! I do not recognise our Marie! What a splendid pose she has already!"

Madame de Vauban turned her eyes gravely.

"Dear Princess, I do what I can—it is almost too much for me."

"We see that and appreciate it. And how are things?"

"We act!"

"The Prince of Friul? . . ."

"I have written to him a while ago. . . ."

The Princess moved her fan energetically.

"Extreme gratitude! Lord! what an important and decisive moment! Have you salts near at hand? I am fainting!"

"Dear Princess! . . ."

"And she, our dear Marie, what strength of character!"

"And it is thanks to the sentiment for Gorayski."

"How poetical! Truly, I admire her so much. I did not think she was equal to such a sacrifice. But perhaps it would be wise to see Talleyrand? . . . He can facilitate things; and then it is necessary to let him know that it was not done without him. . . ."

"As you like, although the question is about the Emperor's answer."

"Emperor's? Dear Countess! Emperor's?"

"For the audience might take place to-day."

"To-day—to-day? Is it possible?"

"There . . . if . . . who knows . . . perhaps it would be well to tranquillise the Chamberlain. It is late, the audience may be long. . . . If you would help me . . ."

"I will do everything, dear Countess! There is no sacrifice for which I am not ready for Marie, for Anastazy, for our family. I assure you that Anastazy will be reasonable. Dear Marie! How interesting she looks to-day! A . . . a . . . Pan Wybicki addresses her! Wybicki in your drawing-room!"

The Countess made a movement of impatience, and put her *lorgnon* to her eyes.

"Yes, it is he! I neither expected nor care for the honour. I do not understand, and I am even afraid! . . ."

"So am I. I am sure he is intriguing! He already cares for her influence."

Madame de Vauban smiled contemptuously.

"He shall not get it here! Permit me, my dear Princess, I must inquire if there is an answer."

The Countess went out to a further apartment, while the Princess, not satisfied with Madame de Vauban's assurances, turned to the spot where Pan Joseph Wybicki was conversing with Pani Walewska.

"A . . Pan Wybicki! I am very glad! Do I disturb you?"

Wybicki saluted in silence, and looked beseechingly on Pani Walewska, who understood the look, and said quietly: "Princess,

you must excuse me, but Pan Wybicki was my late father's friend; we have so many things to say to each other, and I am afraid it would not interest you. . . ."

The Princess shivered, but smiled.

"Ah, it is very interesting! You do not doubt, my dear, that every detail concerning you interests me?"

"But those details are not interesting at all."

"Wicked girl!" answered the Princess, quietly seating herself beside Pani Walewska. "You have no idea how I feel with you."

The Chamberlain's wife did not answer, and having turned to Wybicki, said with emphasis: "And then, we have nothing else to say to each other. Your words are too dear to me for me to forget them."

Wybicki rose.

"Not only my gratitude for those words . . ."

The Princess smiled.

"Pan Wybicki, if I did not know you I should think that you were very sentimental."

"And perhaps you would be not far from the truth, Princess. I have the honour . . ."

He bowed, and went to another part of the room.

"What an odd, unbearable fellow!" said the Princess, when Wybicki left them. "What manners, what a pose of a Secretary of State! Truly, I cannot understand the Emperor."

Pani Walewska was silent. The Princess looked at her askance, and said intentionally: "An intriguer in the first place. A cunning and clever intriguer, who knows how to play on most tender chords!"

Pani Walewska did not answer this time either. The Princess grew impatient.

"*Enfin,* my dearest, I am sure that Wybicki tried to persuade you to take part in some great schemes which would promote his own interest."

"What gives you such an opinion?"

"Ah, *chère,* for I know the people! Could you deny it? Such men you should avoid, they will only entangle you in an intrigue."

"You are very severe on Wybicki."

"Not at all, but I care for you! You should think of yourself, of your family; you know how we are all devoted to you—we all, without exception, love you. . . ."

"I never doubted that. I have had so many proofs of their kindness."

"Marie, I take your words literally. Let us talk frankly. You must not mind the first difficulties. You entered our family unexpectedly. Of course, it is Anastazy's fault. He did not prepare the ground, and introduced you all at once. Therefore we were cool, and avoided you; but it was enough for you to appear. You spoke, and our prejudices disappeared and changed into most hearty sentiments. Take Anthony, for instance. He is very promising, not because he is my son, *mais vraiment* he is a young man with manners and style! He only saw you once, and he asks continually about *cette chère tante!* He simply makes me jealous. He wishes very much to join the Imperial general staff. He is only seventeen, but on the staff he could . . . it is an honourable position, he could make a career. . . . Therefore, should you have an opportunity, push him a little. He deserves it—he is a good boy."

The Princess stopped, expecting a solemn assurance.

Pani Walewska played indifferently with her fan.

"But perhaps I bore you?"

"Ah, not at all—I was thinking of something else."

Princess Jablonowska's face grew blue.

"Excuse me for having troubled you . . . I did not imagine . . . I am very much obliged for your sincerity. I will not venture to interrupt your thoughts. You are very fashionable . . . I admire you, although I do not predict a success. . . ."

Here the Princess rose, and, with the consciousness of offended dignity, rushed to Madame de Vauban, who noticed the Princess's irritation.

"You have something to tell me, dear friend?"

"Yes . . . but not here. . . ."

Madame de Vauban conducted the Princess to a side boudoir.

"You are excited."

"Have you salts? I can hardly breathe. It is awful—it is unbearable! One cannot allow that!"

"But what is it?"

"Well, I tell you. All our efforts, trouble, sacrifices, are lost She is simply breaking loose! A little while ago she answered me in such a manner that all hopes to find her at least . . . a well-wishing person, are gone. She is cold, selfish!"

"But, Princess . . ."

"Yes, yes, my dear! A word from her was enough for me! I am convinced that there is no hope! She is my sister-in-law, but a *mésalliance* remains a *mésalliance!* Anastazy made an unpardonable blunder. I explained to her—I used my best endeavours; every one of my words breathed attachment to her, and she answered me: 'I was thinking of something else.' *C'est inexplicable, incroyable!*"

"What then?" asked Madame de Vauban coolly.

"I do not agree—I oppose! Either let her humiliate herself before me, or let her return where she came from! I wash my hands—even I am going at once to M. de Périgord! One must find something else!"

"I do not believe it is such an easy matter. The Emperor is very busy."

"One can act upon him."

"I doubt it!"

"Even if so, I withdraw—I do not give my permission."

Madame de Vauban smiled indulgently.

"Dear Princess, I am afraid it is too late for retreat."

"Do you wish to say that you alone will persevere? . . ."

"I do not see any other alternative."

"I am very much surprised, for if you expect any gratitude you will be disappointed. I have only come to know her to-day! She played a part till she felt strong enough. . . . Unfortunately, she betrayed herself too early. . . ."

"I do not defend her at all!" answered Madame de Vauban quietly. "I was neither attracted by gratitude, nor am I discouraged by lack of it. I amuse myself. . ."

"And if I begged of you?"

"Truly, I could not answer. Excuse me! A letter!"

The Princess tightened her lips.

Madame de Vauban was slowly tearing the envelope of a letter handed to her by a lackey.

"Waiting for an answer."

The Countess glanced at the note.

"No answer. Say it is well."

The lackey disappeared behind a curtain.

"Then, coming back to our subject," said the Princess gravely, "can I count on you?"

Madame de Vauban smiled enigmatically, and handed to the Princess the note just received, which contained the following laconic words: "To-night at ten o'clock; C. is informed."

The Princess looked puzzled at the Countess.

"I do not understand . . . some secret."

"Ah, there is no more secret now . . . the matter is decided! It is the answer for which I was waiting."

"For her? For that?" asked the Princess nervously.

"From Duroc."

"From Duroc? 'To-night at ten o'clock. C. is informed.' Who is informed?"

"You are not quick! Constant! The Emperor's faithful valet."

"Constant! Constant informed! It is too much for me! Permit me to rest! Have you the salts? Rub my temples! Constant! Oh! how moved I am! I am fainting! Yes, yes, that way, rub well! I shall soon be familiar with the thought."

The Countess hastened to her friend's help, and evidently not believing in the efficacy of the salts, she had recourse to persuasion.

"It is done! Fate disposed it so! I did not expect, myself, such rapid progress! But I do not think it will last! I doubt if she will be able to keep up the sentiment.'

"Speak, speak!" whispered the Princess. "It relieves—it gives strength."

"Marie lacks instinct. Then she is too much a country girl. I am ready to lay any wager that in a month's time the idyll will be over. It is not Napoleon's habit to be sentimental."

"Speak, speak, my dear!"

"What should I say? In the meanwhile, she is at the top. You are too late, Princess, you cannot stop that which is done. . . ."

The Countess could not finish, for the Princess's two arms encircled her.

"My dear, my only friend! You are speaking the truth! It is my duty to sacrifice myself. I must be with her, and watch over her, for if I . . ."

"But a little while ago . . ." rejoined the Countess.

"I did not think . . . 'To-night at ten o'clock. C. is informed'—it is incredible! Excuse me, my dear, I must . . ."

"Where to?"

"I must . . ."

The Princess, having taken hold of the train of her long dress, went into the drawing-room.

Pani Walewska was just listening to Rautenstrauch's commonplace witticisms, when she was suddenly covered with the Princess's kisses.

"Dear child! You could not believe! Look at my emotion! I cannot dominate it! All that concerns you . . ."

"But, Princess . . .!"

"Nothing, nothing, my dearest! I needed to kiss you—at such a moment!"

Rautenstrauch smiled.

"It seems strange to you? But the most elegant drawing-room ceases to be formal where the family hearth begins. . . ."

"I did not dare to doubt it."

"Do not defend yourself! I know your ways! I have tears in my eyes, I have. . . . For . . . for at sight of Marie I forget even about *convenances*. Excuse me . . .!"

Rautenstrauch withdrew discreetly.

The Princess had a new outburst of tenderness.

"Do you see, my dear! I am always with you . . . always! You do not imagine how much trouble, how many obstacles I have conquered, and all in the name of my love for you! I have no daughter! I love you as if you were my child! Dear child!"

"The Countess has the honour of asking *Madame la Chambellane* for a moment of conversation," resounded the monotonous voice of Madame de Vauban's valet.

The Princess grew pale, and said to the man—

"Very well—in a minute. . . ."

"But, *Madame la Comtesse* . . ."

"You can go. . . ."

"But, Princess, permit me," said Pani Walewska.

"I know what she wishes to tell you."

"But even if that is the case . . ."

"Well, then, the answer has come! All is settled! To-night at ten o'clock. 'Constant is informed!' Understand? Beware of her! She wishes to entangle you for her plans. She has been intriguing all her life. I first brought you the final news. I—I cannot speak! Let me kiss you once more. Do not mind my constant warnings, but it is my duty to protect you. Constant is informed, and when he is informed, then . . . the Emperor! If you wish, I will go to Constant. I will talk about you."

"To . . . a valet?"

"Dear child! And Ryx! Our late king's valet—he was a Knight of the Order; everybody was obliged to reckon with him. I answer for Constant."

Pani Walewska has only now understood the whole truth. Her eyes filled with tears.

"Then you say, that to-day . . .?"

"Yes, yes, Marie! To day, for certain. Constant is informed. Then, if you have an opportunity to mention—although it would be the best to think what you are going to ask for. . . ."

"What?"

The Princess dropped her eyes.

"For . . . do you see . . . I do not know if I shall be able to explain it to you. . . . All men are alike. At the first moment they are ready to do anything . . . and then they cool down. Therefore, if you do not gain at once, perhaps you will never get it."

"It is true," answered Pani Walewska pensively.

"You must think it over! For Anastazy a seat in the senate and the grand riband. . . ."

Pani Walewska shivered.

"Then, one could get some office for Ksawery . . . provided it is well paid . . . for you know . . . many children. . . . The elder ones wish to enter the army—there will be no difficulty about that—two colonels more or less . . ."

"And you, Princess?"

"I?" answered the Princess modestly, hearing the irony in

the question—"I? Nothing! I care for my son. . . . I think I mentioned to you that two of our estates were confiscated by the Prussians! It would be only right that they should be returned to us! Nothing else! Provided I am with you, except that in case of an opportunity, I should like to become a lady-in-waiting. . . ."

"What more?"

"Marie, you are talking as if you doubted my disinterestedness. . . ."

"On the contrary—I am sure of it!"

After this conversation, interrupted again by Madame de Vauban's valet, Pani Walewska was obliged to listen to the Countess's confidences, which, although different in form, were not different in substance from those of the Princess.

Here also Pani Walewska was obliged to listen to exclamations, promises, beseechings, sighings, preachings about gratitude, till she so tired out the Countess by her passiveness, that Madame de Vauban changed the subject and passed to advice.

"You must arm yourself, dear child, with presence of mind! Answer him quickly—have ten words for each of his. Remember about sentiment. I am sure he will like it! Naturally you will emphasise the fact that you respect the purple, that you are dazzled by the hero's fame; but your sentiment begins at the point where he is without a crown! Permit me to give you a little speech. When, as is very probable, he reproaches you for your coolness, you will half close your eyes, you will give to your voice a slight timid vibration, and you will say: 'Your Majesty, Sire, stops my heart throbbing!' and then you will add, in order to accentuate it: 'For it is frightened, it is dazzled, for it wishes to see you in the uniform of a soldier, for it is afraid of the summit rising above the clouds, for it throbbed not for the Emperor . . .' Here you will sigh slightly, and will cover your face with your hands."

The lesson, thus conducted, lasted till evening. Pani Waelwska sat silently, not protesting, not interrupting, not asking for anything.

From time to time Pani Walewska's eyes grew animated; they burned with some mysterious fire, and seemed to penetrate the Countess, who, notwithstanding her naturally cool blood,

grew confused under that magnetic glance. Sometimes Pani Walewska's passiveness aroused in the Countess doubts and suspicions; then she was bolder, she would go to the extreme of conjectures and insinuations, hoping to arouse a protest, an opposition—but all in vain.

Pani Walewska remained cool, immovable.

Night came—a cold, damp, penetrating night. The drawing-rooms in the Blacha Palace became empty. Madame de Vauban's guests, not being able to see Pani Walewska, who remained apart, went out, carrying throughout the town quantities of rumours, spun out from the Countess's few words and the Princess's insinuations.

In one of Madame de Vauban's boudoirs Princess Jablonowska and Fryne Czosnowska were waiting for the ending of the Countess's conversation with Pani Walewska. Fryne tried to entertain the Princess and to lessen her impatience, but it increased in geometrical proportion to the progress of the hands of the clock.

The clock struck nine. The Princess rushed from the sofa.

"It is impossible! The Countess does not think of consequences. It is time. . . ."

"I assure you, Princess, that Vauban is never too late."

"It may be . . . but I also have to say something to Marie. . . ."

"What I would not give if I were in her place! . . ."

"No, I cannot wait any longer! She must have forgotten the time."

"Oh, Vauban! Vauban will not forget it," said Fryne with conviction.

As if to prove that she was right, the Countess appeared at a side door.

The Princess rushed to her.

"My dearest! Nine o'clock! It is time! . . . "

"But it is only a few steps from here."

"And what of Marie?"

The Countess sighed slightly.

"I did all I could!"

"And? . . ."

"It seems that all is right—only! . . ."

"Only what?" inquired the Princess impetuously.

"She is so apathetic that I feel uneasy."

"Permit me, my dearest, I must know. . . ."

"Her quick decision, her determination, confirms my suspicion that the sentiment for Gorayski reaches a point where it may be dangerous. . . ."

"Dangerous!"

"Very! To-day she decided for his sake, and I do not doubt that she will talk only about him."

"But in that case our little plot may come out. . . ."

"Well, not at once; I was so careful, that the Emperor knows about some debauch; therefore he will not be surprised at a request."

"Then what do you think?"

"The game is begun; we shall see afterwards."

"My dearest, dearest Henriette! There is no sacrifice which I would not be ready to make for you!"

The ladies sealed this with hearty kisses, and busied themselves with last preparations; while the Princess took on herself the trouble of final advices which might be useful to Pani Walewska, the Countess pushed forward energetically the last attacks on the Castle.

About twenty minutes before ten o'clock a carriage stopped at the portico of the Blacha Palace. From its box a footman, wearing Madame de Vauban's livery, jumped down and rushed directly to the vestibule, where he asked to be announced to the Countess.

The servants of the palace were astonished at the daring of their fellow-servant. The hesitation, however, was interrupted by Madame de Vauban's valet.

The arrival of the carriage was echoed in the Countess's boudoir, made Princess Jablonowska nervous, and reddened Fryne Czosnowska's cheeks still more.

Madame de Vauban came to Pani Walewska, who was sitting in a deep armchair, touched her shoulder lightly, and said, "Marie, it is time!"

"Time?"

"Yes, dearest; the carriage is waiting! We must be going!"

Pani Walewska moved her head in sign of consent.

The Countess made a sign to Fryne, who began to wrap up Pani Walewska in a large, costly fur.

Pani Walewska abandoned herself passively to Czosnowska; did not try to find out why Fryne hugged her so passionately, whispering from time to time, "Ah! how happy you must be!" The Chamberlain's wife was not surprised either at the Princess's effusion, nor at the tenderness showered on her by Madame de Vauban. She heard and understood well the admonition about prudence and about the necessity of concentrating her presence of mind, and the pious aspirations for success, and various scales of sentiments played ostentatiously by all three ladies.

Pani Walewska, although seeming to share with her tutors their fears and hopes, was quiet and cold within. All that was happening to her and round her seemed to her perfectly natural, right, and logical. Had she not almost agreed to intercede for Gorayski? Had she not promised Malachowski? Had she not engaged her word to Wybicki? Had they not asked her to keep the secret, to bear the sole burden in public opinion, not to protest if she were accused of petty calculations and paltry plans, so that nobody should even suspect how weighty was her mission on their first interview with the Emperor?

With that consciousness of her important mission her bosom heaved, her heart throbbed noisily and made her stretch herself proudly; it blossomed into a contemptuous smile on her lips; it covered every one of her words with assurance.

In the name of the most sacred sentiments, in the name of the most solemn adjuration, they asked her to sacrifice herself, to become to her country another Judith! And so she would be. She desired to meet him as soon as possible—to throw at his feet those weighty words, to dictate conditions to him, and then . . . then to delight in the joy of others, to live by the memory of the accomplished deed, and to carry her own sorrow and pain beyond the world. . . .

Pani Walewska was seized by a nervous trembling. She was irritated at Madame de Vauban being slow.

"Let us be going!"

"In a minute, my dearest! Only one *tunique*. . . ."

"You are dressing as if for a Court reception," said Pani Walewska angrily.

"I must—at all events."

Once in the carriage, Pani Walewska became quieter.

The Countess, who with entire self-denial was fulfilling the duties of a chaperon, wished to utilise even those last moments in giving her pupil some illuminating advice; but Pani Walewska interrupted her: "Permit me to collect my thoughts!"

"I thought I could help you . . . before all . . ."

"I know what I have to do!"

"My dearest! What? We are in the Castle!"

The carriage produced a hollow sound—rolled several yards further in the courtyard of the Castle, and stopped at the second gate.

The door opened noisily. Pani Walewska found herself before a dimly-lighted hall, in front of which stood a broad-shouldered grenadier.

Pani Walewska went mechanically towards the hall, but the grenadier looked at her, and said sharply: "Who? Where?"

Pani Walewska became confused, not knowing what to answer; but at the same time the footman began to talk in a low voice with the grenadier, while Madame de Vauban, who alighted after Pani Walewska, deemed it proper to explain to her that unexpected obstacle.

"They do not know yet! Cover your face with a veil! Naturally, it will be changed later on. . . . Court rigour, and Duroc's inexperience too. At the Court of the Louis, a Marshal would be dismissed for such impropriety. And then, they are only camping here; they have not had time. . . . One must be lenient!"

"I do not know about anything!" sounded the grenadier's voice, talking with the footman. "It is past ten; I have no order! You must see the captain on duty, there to the left, in the corner, in that window, where the light is."

The footman rushed in the said direction, while the grenadier muttered: "Constant! Constant has no right to give me any orders! *Sacrebleu!* Nine o'clock, lights out, and even a battalion of Constants cannot pass! . . . Ladies to M. Constant!"

"My friend," said Madame de Vauban, with a conciliatory accent, "you do not need to be in a bad temper. . . ."

The grenadier rapped the ground impatiently with his rifle.

"In the first place, not a friend, but a sergeant of the second company of grenadiers. Then, the road to M. Constant is open during the day. I advise you to get into the coach and go back."

"It is not your concern."

"Mine or not, you cannot see Constant. The Little Corporal does not think of going to bed yet; Constant cannot leave him for one moment! You have no idea!"

"What an amusing man!" said the Countess, with well-acted ease.

"Better not make any remarks! The captain is coming. . . . You will have an answer."

At the further end of the courtyard measured sounds of spurs were heard. Pani Walewska was seized by nervous trembling.

"Let us return," she whispered.

"Child! What an idea!"

"Let us return," insisted Pani Walewska. "I cannot stay here one minute longer."

The Countess took hold of her arm.

"Marie, think! Impossible!"

"Let me go home."

"What nonsense! Only think—he is waiting! Courage! The officer! Cover your face!"

Pani Walewska pushed a *fichu* over her eyes.

"You will be so kind as to follow me," said the officer brought by the footman, and went to the further end of the courtyard.

The Countess pressed Pani Walewska's arm and pulled her along.

The officer walked swiftly, exchanging short words with sentries, and directed his steps towards a dark corridor. From this he conducted them to the first floor, and showed them into a large vaulted room, in which two other officers were shortening their time on duty by playing cards.

The officers, seeing their comrade and two ladies, rushed from behind the table.

"Captain to the deuce!" began joyfully the young officer. "You are a magician, that you . . ."

The captain interrupted him by an energetic gesture of the hand, and said: "Lieutenant Rousseau, you will conduct these two ladies to the commissary on duty, and will tell him that they wish to see Constant on business."

The lieutenant stretched himself up, tightened his shoulder-belt, and having bowed to the ladies, went to the door, while the captain said to Madame de Vauban: "Pray, follow the lieutenant."

"We thank you very much," answered she with dignity.

The captain smiled ironically.

"Oh, not at all! The lieutenant is waiting."

Madame de Vauban pressed Pani Walewska's arm significantly, and they followed the officer through a labyrinth of dimly-lighted corridors and half-empty rooms.

Rousseau conducted them swiftly, and then stopped at the door guarded by two grenadiers of the Guard. The lieutenant pressed the handle and introduced the ladies to a large room, in which a broad-shouldered man, wearing a green swallow-tail coat with gold lace, was sitting at the door.

Rousseau whispered a few words to the commissary, who rose quickly from the armchair, glanced sharply at the ladies, and said to the lieutenant: "Excuse me, sir, I know about one, and here are two!"

Rousseau smiled ironically. The commissary frowned.

"M. Rousseau . . . good-bye."

The lieutenant, recalled by this farewell to his duty, left the room. The commissary pointed out the chairs to the ladies.

"Pray be seated; we will see!"

Then he rang the bell, and having given some order to a lackey who came, sat down in the armchair. The lackey returned with an answer; the official having read it, came to the ladies, bowed to them, and said solemnly: "M. Constant is waiting."

"At last!" said Madame de Vauban, sighing.

"Pray follow me!" said the commissary; turned to a curtain covering a door leading to a corridor, and, after having passed several small rooms, he stopped before a door.

"Here is M. Constant."

The Countess was ready to turn the handle when the door opened, and in the doorway appeared the bony head of a man, with small piercing eyes and jovially smiling face.

"Your humble servant! Pray come in! Be so kind. . . . Here on the sofa. You will be more comfortable."

The Countess tugged Pani Walewska slightly towards the sofa. The man saluted, smiled, and spoke further: "I was beginning to doubt . . . for it is near ten o'clock! It is true that Duroc assured me, but with ladies it is always very difficult. . . . But, pray, take off your cloaks! It is warm here. . . ."

Constant helped the ladies to get rid of their furs and shawls, looking attentively at Pani Walewska, and when she, by a last nervous movement, threw off the lace *fichu* from her face, he half closed his eyes and became silent.

Pani Walewska, feeling the looks of the Emperor's valet, angrily tightened her lips. That look irritated, almost offended her.

"How long yet?" asked the Countess.

Constant pulled out a watch.

"Five minutes!"

"How exact you are!"

"I cannot be otherwise with that whimsical man! I can announce you at ten o'clock . . . and I shall do it with pleasure. . . . All my respect and readiness at your disposal. . . . By the way! I was very embarrassed a while ago, for the commissary sent me word asking if the other lady should be admitted. Naturally I guessed, but for a moment I was embarrassed . . . naturally. . . ."

Constant laughed.

Pani Walewska pressed her temples.

"I could not permit . . my friend alone," said Madame de Vauban.

"Undoubtedly!" said the valet, winking with his little eyes. "Ten o'clock! Excuse me . . . I must be going to inquire."

Constant left the room.

"Very nice man."

"A lackey!"

The Countess sighed.

"The Emperor's! . . . But I understand your noble aversion. And what can I say? Do you think, that in me, the blood of the Barbatanes does not ask for due regards? Common sense demands self-sacrifice, and friendship makes the sacrifice sweet. Constant has access to the Emperor. At the Court of Louis, barbers threatened ministers. Napoleon shaves himself; hence Constant's influence! An influence much greater, because the Mameluke Roustan does not know how to use his. . . ."

Pani Walewska smiled ironically.

"You wonder!"

Pani Walewska had no time to answer, for Constant returned; he was solemn and embarrassed.

"What now?"

"Nothing. I told Roustan. The answer will come soon. . . He is still writing. Three couriers are waiting."

"Then, perhaps . . ."

"Impossible to know anything. . . . With him every second, something new. Sometimes it is too hard. A little while ago Roustan brought with him ice-cream, and then Corvisart will suffer for that . . . Sebastiani is the cause . . . I think his career in Constantinople is ended. . "

Constant put his hand pompously under his swallow-tailed uniform.

"Is it possible? Prince Borghese told me quite differently."

Constant smiled contemptuously.

"He does not know anything! He will have a lesson. We will send him to Paris, to his wife! But can I bring you anything? A glass of Burgundy? For it is . ."

Pani Walewska looked sharply at the valet.

"First of all, do your duty, M. Constant, and announce me to his Majesty!"

At that sharp speech, Constant's head sank between his shoulders, and he stammered hesitatingly: "Yes . . . certainly . . . Roustan is informed. . . ."

That answer irritated Pani Walewska, and aroused a desperate energy in her.

"You should not announce me to Roustan! I did not come here to pay a visit in ante-rooms. I am going!"

She rose and went to the door.

The Countess rushed after her and stopped her.

Constant, frightened at such determination, tried to justify himself. "I did not mean to offend. . . ."

"But, naturally, Marie . . . M. Constant is . . ."

"With the greatest respect . . . The Emperor's waiting-room is full of officers on service. Could I dare to show you there?"

"Undoubtedly, dear child; M. Constant, only through . . ."

"I am going. . . ."

At that moment a rap on the door interrupted further argument.

Constant opened the door, exchanged a few words with the person standing behind it, and returned to Pani Walewska triumphantly.

"His Majesty commands me to beg you to wait in the green room!"

"Do you see, do you see! . . ."

Pani Walewska dropped her head.

"Pray, follow me . . . only I would advise you to put on a *fichu*. . . . We shall pass rooms with soldiers."

"Ah, how kind you are, M. Constant! Permit me, my dearest! So now you can . . . you are covered."

"Be so kind . . ." insisted the valet.

Pani Walewska made a few steps, and having noticed that Madame de Vauban did not follow her, she stopped.

"And you?" asked she with uneasiness.

"I—I, my dearest, here . . . remain! I wait . . . you understand? . . ."

"Yes, yes!" assented Pani Walewska feverishly. "You are right. I must go alone! Then it will not be long . . . I know what I have to say. . . . Pray, wait a minute, I shall be back soon. . . ."

"Only more courage! Listen, but do not bind yourself to anything . . . understand! Remember what I told you!" whispered Madame de Vauban.

Pani Walewska tried to smile.

"Oh, be at rest. . . ."

"M. Constant!"

The valet saluted the Countess respectfully, and said: "I know . . . I know. . . . My whole attention . . . my whole experience. . . . Pray, this way. . . ."

As soon as Pani Walewska crossed the threshold of the room, the Castle, which had seemed solitary and deserted, appeared to her full of light and animation. At every step Pani Walewska passed officers of the staff, aides-de-camp, fantastically dressed Mamelukes, and the Court servants in green and gold liveries.

Constant walked ahead, sometimes exchanging salutes, sometimes answering by a smile, and sometimes winking cunningly, and significantly putting a finger on his lips.

Several times amongst the groups of whispering officers there was an irritating murmuring and suppressed laughter at the sight of Pani Walewska, but Constant's one look silenced them.

Pani Walewska guessed the meaning of those whispers; she understood the ironical smiles, she felt through the *fichu* covering her face the impudence of the looks; but notwithstanding all, she did not lose her presence of mind and self-assurance. On the contrary, she seemed to gain strength. She went on proudly, and every beat of her pulse, every drop of her blood rushing to her temples, echoed Malachowski's word—resounded with consciousness of her self-sacrifice.

That sullen crowd, crushed by one of Bonaparte's looks, crawling at his feet, did not know whom they beheld. They did not even suspect that their master, that mighty man before whom they bent, would be at her feet, and what he would be obliged to promise before he could touch even one of her hands!

"Here is the green room," whispered Constant.

Pani Walewska nodded quietly.

"Very well."

Constant cleared his throat, and lifted a curtain covering the door.

Pani Walewska noticed a Mameluke's turban and his brown, apathetic flat face.

The door opened quietly, and she found herself in a large room with green hangings, dimly lighted by candelabra. She looked round. The room was empty; only at its further end,

on the background of a white door, an officer was standing on guard.

Constant stopped and pointed out to Pani Walewska an armchair standing near the wall.

Pani Walewska was surprised.

"Is it here?" she asked in a whisper.

"Yes. There where the orderly officer is . . . the Emperor is there."

"A . . . a . . . Then?"

"Well," explained the valet, "he is busy just now, but soon he will ask you in. . . . He knows that you are waiting. Here you can take off your veil. Warm? And he still complains of the cold. I shall be in the next room."

"You leave us?"

"Such is the order. None is allowed here but the orderly and persons admitted to a special audience. But it will not be long . . . two couriers have been sent off already. . . ."

Constant saluted, and left the room on tiptoe.

This new time of waiting made a very unpleasant impression on Pani Walewska; it at once stopped the circulation of her bright, simple, and sober thoughts, and again aroused in her a feeling of uneasiness and fear.

This was stimulated by the quiet and dusk. Little by little Pani Walewska grew accustomed to that dusk and quiet. The quiet was broken by continual sounds coming from the Emperor's room; strange and incomprehensible sounds, that sometimes seemed to be a short, lively conversation, then a noise of turned-over papers. That noise was interrupted from time to time by the clinking of spurs, marking the movement of the orderly, or by the noise of the street coming into the room.

The dusk presently lifted its veils for Pani Walewska's eyes, who could now distinguish the marble lines of the fireplace, the design of the hangings, the faces of the portraits, the gilt edges of chairs and tables; she even noticed a plate shining on the bearskin of the officer standing motionless at the door, the trimmings of his uniform, and the big hilt of his sword.

The waiting began to tire Pani Walewska. Several times it seemed to her that she heard the noise of the door handle,

that at every moment she would hear her name, but each of the illusions was followed by deeper silence, by greater quiet.

At once the spurs clanked longer.

Pani Walewska turned mechanically towards the officer, but she could not see his face because of the bearskin projecting a shadow on it. Pani Walewska thought then that the time seemed long not to her alone—that this officer must be puzzled by her presence, and that he shortened his time by making conjectures.

Pani Walewska smiled to herself. What did she care about the opinion of such a dummy, when she determined to challenge Napoleon in the face of the whole world?

All at once the door through which Constant introduced Pani Walewska opened wide. Into the room entered an officer wearing a uniform difficult to be distinguished, saluted the orderly silently in the military fashion, and said, breathing heavily, "A courier from Paris!"

The orderly knocked at the door of the Emperor's room and then opened it.

A stream of light rushed from the Emperor's room, and in that light Pani Walewska saw the brown martial face of the courier, and she heard every word.

"Where from?"

"From Paris, Sire!"

"At last! Give it me!"

There was a moment of silence, broken by the noise of a torn envelope, then the laconic conclusion: "Very well! Report to-morrow to the staff!"

The courier retreated backwards. The orderly advanced to close the door, but being pushed slightly by the courier, turned in order to let him pass. At that moment the light coming from the room fell on his face.

Pani Walewska trembled. That officer was Lieutenant Ornano.

In the meanwhile, the door closed and the dusk filled the room again. The courier exchanged a salute with the orderly and left. Then the orderly once more became motionless at the Emperor's door.

Pani Walewska shook off the first impression.

That meeting was unpleasant to her. She did herself not know why, but she would have given much that he had not been here.

Was she not mistaken? No, she was not! It was he! He without any doubt, only very much changed.

Pani Walewska strained her eyes. The orderly seemed to be changed into stone, for now even his spurs did not betray the slightest movement.

Pani Walewska sighed.

The lieutenant evidently had not recognised her, and he could not recognise her, for he never could think that it was she! They had only spoken together a short time.

This assurance that she was unrecognised tranquillised Pani Walewska, but meanwhile aroused in her a strange thought, that although as it was better so, yet notwithstanding everything, it was bad . . . very bad! Pani Walewska tried to render to herself an account of that bad situation, to chase away the inexplicable conviction about it, but all was in vain.

Ornano might have recognised her!

And suppose he was only simulating discretion? . . .

Cold perspiration covered Pani Waleswka's forehead.

"It would be awful!" thought she.

"I imagine your impatience," said some one at her side.

Pani Walewska trembled.

"A . . . it is you, M. Constant!"

"At your service! We have another courier! Cambacères has chosen a good moment! But it is the last! If I could have foreseen that, I would have sent you word that it would be useless before eleven o'clock."

"Yes . . . certainly!"

"Madame, you must be patient a little longer. . . I will go and remind him. . . . He must be in a good humour, for everything is well in Paris. . . ."

"M. Constant!" said Pani Walewska suddenly, tormented by her thoughts. "Who is that officer . . . there?"

The valet bent to her ear.

"Ornano! Cousin! Favourite! Lieutenant of the Chasseurs. But if by any chance he is in your way, then we will find some means of dealing with him, for, Madame, we have always some

means at hand. One word to the Commandant suffices, and such an officer will never see the Emperor's threshold! Ho! ho! Otherwise we could do nothing here. . . ."

"The idea . . . I asked only . . ."

"Ornano . . . Ornano! Prince! And not of yesterday. . . ."

"Thank you. . . ."

"I will go to remind him. For, Madame, pray believe me that I am very sorry."

Constant bowed respectfully, drew his head between his shoulders and went to the imperial threshold.

A stream of light again fell into the room.

"What do you want?" resounded a sharp voice.

"Sire . . . the lady!"

"Let her wait . . . I have said so once!"

Constant withdrew quickly.

"Madame, you heard! He is still busy, but he will soon finish. He will excuse himself afterwards. . . ."

Pani Walewska answered the valet by some gesture. She did not understand what he was saying to her, and for the moment had not even any idea with whom Constant was talking, when a stream of light rushed from the Emperor's room; she saw Ornano's face for the second time, but so much changed that he seemed to her to be a ghost.

"He has recognised you! He knows at last what you are worth!" hissed some voice within Pani Walewska.

She gathered all her energy to dominate the emotion.

Suppose he recognised her, what of that? . . . He thinks! He may think what he pleases. . . . She has before her such a sublime task, that all other considerations are nothing. . . .

"He knows what you are worth! He knows!" hissed the same voice.

Pani Walewska covered her face with her hands.

At any moment the Emperor might call her, and she would be obliged to pass him. She would turn her head away. No! She must not do that. Let their looks meet. If he is not guided by vulgar curiosity, then he will guess her intention. He must guess! Fancies . . . ridiculous fancies! Ornano! She saw him once in her life. It is true he was different from all others . . . quite different!

Suddenly Pani Walewska trembled. Right beside her resounded a subdued voice. Yes—he was speaking to her—speaking a long while, quickly. . . .

Pani Walewska did not understand the words.

Ornano laughed drily.

"You do not even answer! You do not even deny!"

"Forgive me . . . I was not paying attention," she stammered at last.

"Excuse me, then. I have been mad, I believed! When they wanted to convince me . . . I resisted! I defended a dream! Forgive my daring. . . ."

"I have nothing to forgive!"

"Why should you be different?" continued the lieutenant in a whisper. "Why should you be better than the others, or different? I do not know where such illusion came to me from! In the beginning I did not believe my own eyes! I was afraid to believe; but now that impression is gone. . . ."

Ornano was silent.

Pani Walewska looked at him with an effort.

"I do not understand what you mean."

"You are . . . here . . at this time?"

"What then?" asked Pani Walewska, feeling that she said something quite different from her thoughts.

"Do you know where that door leads?"

"Yes . . . to the Emperor's study."

"To shame! Do you hear me?—to shame! Do you wish to meet the fate of Lacoite, de Vandeg, or Charlotte Garrans?"

Ornano took Pani Walewska by the hand.

"Go away from here. There is still time! Go away! . . ."

"I cannot!" moaned Pani Walewska.

"You dream of influence . . . power? You are wrong! To-morrow or the day after you will be thrown away! Do you understand? Your levity will be valued and you will be paid for it! Do you hear me? Nothing more!"

Pani Walewska tightened her lips.

Ornano breathed heavily, and continued in a whisper—

"Retreat while there is time! Run away! I beseech you! Do you think that I am considering myself? I shall be gone to-morrow—you will never see me again. My only desire is to

preserve a pure memory of you, not to witness your madness. You are silent?"

Pani Walewska turned her head with an effort towards the Emperor's room, and said feverishly: "I must go there . . . I must tell him—I must get from him a promise! Nobody else but I! You do not know, you do not guess . . . but it must be so! Duty! . . . I undertook it voluntarily."

Ornano laughed.

"Perhaps you think you will be able to rule? Never! The Emperor alone knows how to appreciate women. He tramples on them—and he is right to act so! What did you come for? What for? Could you swear that you wish to see the Emperor, and that you do not wish to grasp at his power and riches? The Emperor pays well; he knows what the regard of the ladies who wait in his ante-chambers for an audience is worth. . . ."

"Be silent!"

Ornano tugged at his shoulder-belt.

"You are right. . . . I went too far. I said too much. Pray forget my behaviour. It seemed to me that it was my duty. Now I have nothing to reproach myself with."

"I am convinced. I was not mistaken when I thought that you know no more than the appearance."

"What?"

"Then, remember that the reasons which brought me here are beyond your conjectures. Neither have you the right to ask me, nor I the right to answer you."

Ornano stretched himself up.

"Yes, it is true . . . I have no right. Childishness! . . . Dream . . . ridiculous dream! . . . But I beseech you just the same, leave this place, return. There is yet time if you only have the will. I will call Constant!"

"I asked for an audience."

Ornano laughed.

"Audience! You call that an audience?"

Pani Walewska lifted her head proudly.

"I do not understand your irony. I am waiting for an audience with the Emperor of the French!"

"It is impossible! No, a hundred times no! They deceived you, they lied to you. You would not have come here wilfully."

"I cannot explain to myself your words. You are talking as if you doubted some one's honour," whispered Pani Walewska, whom the lieutenant's voice began to frighten.

"Yes, it is true. I do not know myself what I am talking about. But why did you come here? I understand they are deceiving your vigilance. Why are you silent?"

Pani Walewska covered her face with her hands.

Ornano bent to her.

"You do not try to justify yourself. Then can it be true that you willingly? . . ."

"You wish to know? Then, yes, I came here willingly!"

"Without reckoning to yourself how this audience will be understood?"

"It is indifferent to me."

Ornano laughed spasmodically.

"You try to reach so high! Ha! ha! What do you care about the world, about people? . . . Ha! ha! You think that others have not said the same? Ha! ha! And how did you know that you would even be received? Have you heard the command: 'Let her wait!' which often is followed by: 'She can go!' Tell me, is he not right? Do any of you deserve to be treated differently? For why do you come to him? And I did not believe—do you hear me? . . . even to-day I stood up for you! It seemed to me that you were different, that if God has given you so much beauty, then He must have given you also a pure soul and immaculate heart. I curse the moment in which I saw you for the first time; for a moment of bliss you charge the horrid usury of disenchantment! . . ."

"You are not justified in reproaching me. I have not given any reason," stammered Pani Walewska.

"I am not justified! Had I to ask the lily's permission to admire it? Then, it is not permitted to adore a star? . . . Should I have another reason to love you than one meeting of your eyes. . . . Justification! . . . Listen, then: there in my breast is beating a heart for you—it beats with all my life. There is no selfish thought in me. I wish to preserve you immaculate —I wish to die with your image. It surprises you that I defend you, that I am afraid about your purity. . . . Mary! I bend to your feet! I do not ask for anything for myself—nothing! I

do not dare to suppose that you could be able to leave the road of duty, that you should turn your eyes on me! I swear to you that my only wish is to go away with a memory of you . . . go alone! And if I am talking to you, I am doing it not for a paltry motive, for the sake of intrigue, for jealousy! Behind this door is the Emperor! The Emperor whom I worship—I am ready to give my life for him! And you come here to make me hate him! I know you are thinking of power, and certainly I do not know a woman more worthy than you to wear a crown. Were I strong enough I would offer it to you first. I would like to have you for the Empress, to watch at your door, to serve you. Unfortunately, I must see not only that I am powerless, but also that you are blinded. It seems to you that behind that door power is waiting for you; you stretch your arms, and you do not notice the precipice that divides you from it! You will be ruined! Do you hear? The Court will suck out all the best of you and throw you away, taking another victim! And what then? Tell me!"

Pani Walewska trembled! Ornano's words moved her, opened her eyes by their force, fired her imagination.

"Yes—yes, you are right!" she said nervously. "I cannot stay here! Not one moment longer! Malachowski deceived himself. I am not strong enough for such a difficult task. I am weak! I shall perish! Not one moment longer! I was mad to come here. Lead me away from here. I shall return home to Walewice, to my quiet. I return. . . ."

Pani Walewska breathed heavily. Ornano bent to her hand.

"You are good, noble, worthy!" he said with joy. "I thought you so, I guessed you to be so! You could not be different! Excuse my bold words! Forgive me!"

Pani Walewska sprang from her seat.

"Let us come away from here! Lead me . . . lead me!"

Ornano came to his senses.

"I will call Constant. I cannot accompany you. I am on duty!"

"Then you abandon me?"

"Abandon you! . . . If I only could! . . ."

"Constant may not obey me!" interrupted Pani Walewska feverishly.

"I undertake that he will. Then there is only this door to the Emperor's room, and I am guarding it! . . ."

Ornano, not waiting for Pani Walewska's answer, rushed to the door leading to the service room, and he was taking hold of the handle when suddenly the opposite door into the Emperor's room opened with noise.

Napoleon appeared at it.

"Ornano!" came a loud call. The lieutenant stopped as if paralysed, riveted to the floor.

"Sire!" he stammered.

"Here are the papers! To Maret at once!"

The lieutenant automatically approached the Emperor, took from his hand the roll of papers, and went slowly to the door.

In the meanwhile, Napoleon walked to Pani Walewska standing in the centre of the room.

"A . . . you. . . . Pray follow me!"

The officer's spurs clanked violently.

The Emperor turned.

"Ornano!"

"Sire!"

"Have I to repeat my order? March!"

Ornano stretched himself violently and turned to the door.

Napoleon looked after the lieutenant till the door closed after him; then he said simperingly to Pani Walewska: "Well, pray come in!"

She followed him slowly.

Napoleon, not looking after her, entered the room and sat at his desk covered with papers.

Pani Walewska passed the threshold and stopped.

The Emperor looked through some papers, tugged at a large sheet, and having turned imperceptibly, he said abruptly: "Shut the door! Sit down!"

Pani Walewska executed the command.

Quiet ruled supreme in the room.

Pani Walewska became familiar with the light coming from large candelabra reflected in two large mirrors; then little by little she dominated her fright, and began to comprehend the thoughts crowding on her.

At last she was with the Emperor!

She beheld him sitting at the desk! She could see the clouds passing over the imperial brow! She heard the violent short screech of the pen that preceded every throwing aside of the papers; she distinguished large silver monograms upon portfolios scattered on the floor, as well as the complicated design of dark red damask covering the walls; she noticed the large portrait of the last Polish king Poniatowski, and the figure of the secretary bent over the papers at the other end of the room, the sword lying on the chair, and the grimacing face of a satyr standing on the mantelpiece.

She was with the Emperor! One moment more, and she would cast away the burden weighing on her so heavily. She would tell him! She must tell him! But suppose . . . It is true that this audience is quite strange! He told her to wait. Why? He is busy. She was with the Emperor! She was almost forced to come, and now he does not even look at her.

At once it seemed to her that she heard the noise of the spurs behind the door.

There was Ornano! No doubt about it! Why did he speak to her like that? He spoke so convincingly; but how mistaken he was! For what then? She is with the Emperor, and in his behaviour towards her she does not see anything else but indifference and neglect.

The situation seemed to Pani Walewska ridiculous. So many passionate discussions, so many fears, warnings, fights, and at last she was received almost with a shrugging of the shoulders; and now by every movement she was given to understand that her presence cannot hinder him from reading reports, that she does not deserve even a few words of conversation between the reading of two documents.

And Malachowski imagined . . .! Not he alone, but all of them. She also was mistaken. . . .

But, such being the case, why had he asked her to see him?

Impatience began to take hold of Pani Walewska. The thought that her presence was forgotten tormented her. The Emperor did not lift his eyes from the papers; he moved several times in his armchair, but it seemed only to turn away from her more.

A long, unbearable moment passed. At last, at the other end

of the room, a slight movement was heard. The Emperor's secretary rose, gathered together his papers, and having approached him on his tiptoes, he put them on the edge of the table.

"Have you finished?" muttered Napoleon.

"Yes, Sire."

"You can go."

The secretary bowed, and went towards the door. Napoleon called after him: "Méneval!"

"Sire?"

"Remind me to-morrow about Talma. The actors of the Comedy have quarrelled again."

Méneval saluted for the second time; then he went.

The Emperor remained alone with Pani Walewska.

When the secretary left she was again seized with nervous trembling. She was certain that now, at any moment, the Emperor would turn to her, that the decisive moment for Malachowski's hopes had come.

But, contrary to her supposition, Napoleon bent over the desk and concentrated himself on the papers.

Pani Walewska became quiet. A bitter smile twisted her beautiful face. The clock on the mantelpiece struck twelve o'clock.

The Emperor rose suddenly from the chair, pushed it, and began to walk across the room. Then he stopped near Pani Walewska.

"Blow out the candles!"

Pani Walewska went to the branched candlesticks.

The Emperor started again walking across the room, stopping from time to time at the desk and glancing at the papers, as if verifying their contents.

Pani Walewska, having blown out the lights, returned to the sofa, turning round the desk so as not to meet Napoleon walking to and fro.

The room now was almost dark, it being lighted only by an oil lamp with a green shade standing on the desk, and concentrating its light on the papers.

Pani Walewska followed the Emperor's silhouette furtively, but it was in the shadow, and only when he came near the

lamp could she see the colours of his uniform and the sharp outlines of his features.

Pani Walewska was counting mechanically the tick-tack of the clock.

Five . . . ten . . . twenty . . . thirty. . . No, it cannot continue any longer. She would rise and go.

The Emperor is busy. He has no time. She ought to go out unnoticed. It is late . . . very late. And then Vauban will be making conjectures. And not she alone. Princess Jablonowska, Ornano, Fryne—all of them. . . . They wished to apply their measure to him, to Napoleon. But suppose she should now fall at his feet and tell him why she came here? Suppose she tells him the whole truth . . . all her most secret thoughts . . .?

Pani Walewska smiled ironically to herself.

And how should she begin? She was asked to come, and if, notwithstanding that, he has nothing to tell her, if he does not feel it his duty at least to say a few commonplace words of politeness to her, if he treats her so coolly—so indifferently—then how could she suppose that he will listen to her, much less grant her anything? . . . The Emperor spoke to her, he asked her for a conversation, and now he perhaps regrets it; he is meditating, perhaps, how he can get rid of her.

Self-esteem moved Pani Walewska; she rose and went towards the door.

The Emperor, however, caught the rustling of her dress, lifted his head, and said impatiently: "Where are you going?"

"Sire!"

"Sit down."

Pani Walewska stood motionless. Napoleon came to her.

"What have you to tell me? What? You have come at last! Who taught you to play a comedy with me? You are beautiful . . . it is no news to you . . . I suppose you repeat that to yourself every day? . . . What? Do not frown. You are beautiful. . . ."

Napoleon's voice changed into subdued muttering. His hand touched Pani Walewska's face; she retreated with disgust. The Emperor seized her by the hand.

"Well, well, be not angry. Why do you not speak? Do

you know why I asked you to come? To tell you that I love you. . . . Do you hear? I love you!"

Pani Walewska covered her face with her hands.

Napoleon frowned.

"Be reasonable; I do not like comedies. You have already abused my good will. It seems to you that I am going to sigh like a youngster. Be calm! Are you afraid? And perhaps you have some request? Of course! Well, out with it! it becomes too tedious."

Pani Walewska made a violent movement, and said with an outburst: "Yes, Sire, I have a request . . . more than a request. . . ."

"What is it?"

"That your Majesty will not insult me; not humiliate me. . . ."

Napoleon's eyes shone with vivid light; on his lips appeared a sweet smile.

"You are a capricious child. Do not interpret my words wrongly. Sit here beside me; like that. . . . You got the mastery over me! Do you think that I am pleased with that sentiment? I would first like to break that chain which you have put on me. Hence my irritability. Oho! my little one! you thought that resistance was your privilege alone. You are afraid . . . and you do not think that the depth of your eyes, that those lovely hands, that those shining teeth, are not a hundred times more dangerous? . . . I to humiliate you! . . . But do you know why? Because I thought that you came here not only to chain me with your looks, but also to wrench away a part of my power. . . . For I thought that you did not come to me, but to my crown, to my sceptre, to my imperial mantle. . . . What? Can you deny it? You see . . . Then you are right to wonder. I . . . to insult you! . . . But you are so much, so much to me that if I could, I would seat you where neither I should be obliged to stoop down to you, nor you to creep to me. I . . . humiliate you? . . . Mary, I want you, for I must love you! I have not sought you; I did not try to know you; you crossed my way by your own impulse. . . ."

"Is it not permitted to a subject . . .?"

"Do not talk like that to me. Fate conducted you, and it is done. You came. To-day you must not even mention the motives by which you were prompted. It suffices for me that you are near me, that I can look at you!"

The Emperor's voice grew softer and softer; Napoleon's eyes were burning.

"Sire, permit me to go."

Bonaparte laughed indulgently.

"And you suppose that I would let you go? You are afraid . . . afraid of me! You are crying! The thought that you will be my joy makes you sad to such a degree."

"I do not belong to myself!"

Napoleon seized her hand and spoke violently—

"Yes . . . for you are mine! Do you understand? From to-day nobody has any right over you. You will be with me. I am mighty enough to surround you with such a power that nobody will dare to raise his eyes to you. I will give you palaces and riches; I will make your life beautiful and full of delight! You will be my star, and every one of your wishes will be a command to me. I will oblige the most powerful to seek one of your smiles. I will write your name on the pages of history. I shall have the world at my feet, and I shall be at yours. Everybody that is dear to your heart will be so to me also. To your family I shall give honours and riches—I shall give them everything they wish for. I do not know a sacrifice great enough for you. . . . You will permit me to seek some rest beside you after hard work; you will have a loving word for me; you will persuade me that you love me not for the crown and sceptre. . . ."

Bonaparte became silent. Pani Walewska was sitting motionless, as if listening to the Emperor's words.

Napoleon bent to her.

"You are mine, Mary! Do you hear? I love you!"

Pani Walewska pushed aside, with a swift movement of her hand, the hair that was slipping on her forehead, and pressing her hands nervously, said hesitatingly: "Sire, were you not an Emperor, I would not hesitate with my answer."

Bonaparte seized her hands, and covered them with kisses.

"Speak like that. My presentiment did not deceive me."

"But, Sire," continued Pani Walewska with increasing energy, "if you have doubts that I was prompted by calculations, I must be afraid that it is only your absolute might, your desire, that does not know any obstacles, your Court, flattering any of your wishes, gave me to you as a sacrifice for a momentary passion. . . ."

Napoleon dropped her hands.

"Speak on, speak!"

Pani Walewska rose, and said, after a moment of silence: "Therefore, Sire, I must be cautious. I must remember to-morrow, which may bring me disgrace. I must think how, in case I am deserted, I should find consolation. . . ."

Napoleon laughed sarcastically.

"Aha! You are so careful! Ha, ha, ha! Well, what more? How much? Speak, why do you not? Certainly it is better to set the price! Well, what do you wish for? Go on, quick! I do not like long bargaining!"

Pani Walewska staggered under the weight of the Emperor's hoarse voice.

Napoleon did not pay any attention to the impression he made, and urged with increasing anger.

"Do not stand on ceremonies! I am ready to say that I like such frankness! Say, then! I am rich enough! Well, you are silent?"

Pani Walewska threw herself at the Emperor's feet.

"What is the matter with you?"

"Sire! return to my country her existence—revive her, call her to life . . . rebuild! . . ."

Bonaparte bent to her in order to lift her up.

"Mad woman! . . . A hundred times mad!"

"Permit me to remain as I am. I will be your slave, your humblest servant! Only look at the millions of arms stretched out to you! Only realise the hopes of our legions, only reward them for years of sacrifices!"

"Madame, rise, if you please!"

"I do not ask you for anything for myself," besought she; "I do not wish for anything!"

"Rise!" commanded the Emperor imperatively, helping her to do so.

"You do not know yourself what you are talking about! Childishness! They have suborned you, they are using you for a tool!"

"Yes, it is true, Sire!" said Pani Walewska with an effort. "But I hope, I believe that I am seconding your own wishes, that the fulfilment of our hopes will give millions of hearts that will throb for you, millions of people that will be ready to die for you!"

Napoleon put one of his hands under his uniform and began feverishly to walk to and fro in the room.

"Sire, we are waiting for one word from you, the hope of hearing it. . . ."

Bonaparte stopped suddenly before Pani Walewska.

"Who taught you that speech? Then you come here for that purpose? You recited your lesson till you have learned it by heart! What! Do you imagine that I shall become your knight-errant—that from the ruin of quarrels, disorder, imaginary ambitions and selfishness of your aristocracy, the insolence of your nobility—here, hundreds of miles from my own country, I shall build a palace of cards? Then I have given them an answer, even too generous a one, and in return I have until now promises . . . hunger and diseases in the army . . . lack of shelter for my soldiers . . . I have excuses and complaints, so that . . . that I regret, that I did not come here as an enemy!"

"Sire!" whispered Pani Walewska with a trembling voice.

"Be silent! You have recited the lesson they taught you. Enough of it! I cannot bear women mixing in politics. Enough!"

Pani Walewska tightened her lips and went towards the door.

The Emperor crossed her way.

"Where to? . . . You shall remain here!"

"Sire!"

"You shall remain!" repeated Bonaparte with a muffled voice, "for I wish it! Do you hear?"

Darkness covered Pani Walewska's eyes. She felt warm breath near her face, she heard words which burned her, wounded her, crushed her. She understood that Napoleon's every word, his every entreaty and every oath were forming one strong chain that was put round her, but she lacked strength to answer, to find words.

And the Emperor's voice, from being irritated and angry, from penetrating like steel, changed into a hardly-heard whisper.

"I love you! You must stay with me, and you shall stay! I take you! You are beautiful . . . you are mine! . . ."

"Never!" cried Pani Walewska with a desperate outburst.

Bonaparte grew pale; sparks came from his eyes. He bent his head, he stretched out his arms and seized her by her shoulders.

Pani Walewska wished to say something, but she could only move her lips—she fainted.

Napoleon, feeling the weight of her inert body that fell into his arms, laughed, and that laughter was answered by the clanking of his orderly's spurs on the other side of the door.

CHAPTER XII

AFTER an almost sleepless night the Chamberlain was just dressing, when Princess Jablonowska was announced. He quickly put on a dressing-gown and went to meet her.

The Princess was unusually solemn, and when, after the ordinary exchange of greetings, the Chamberlain began to complain, not sparing to reproach his sister at every moment, and making bitter exclamations against Madame de Vauban, the Princess smiled coolly, and answered: "Ah, my dear, your arguments would be very good in the mouth of a paltry nobleman. You are talking as if you did not know the Court and the world. Marie is in the right place."

"In your imagination, but not in mine."

"Directly you decided to use her for your ambitious plans . . ."

The Chamberlain rapped his snuff-box violently.

"It does not mean that I shall permit her to be in the hands of that intriguing woman."

"You do not imagine how much you are indebted to Madame de Vauban."

"I do not care for her services. I have enough of her. She wishes to entangle Marie, to catch her in snares. I have ample proof it. She went to her yesterday. . . . I was waiting till midnight. Do you know what has happened?"

"She was taken ill, and Madame de Vauban kept her. There is nothing extraordinary in that."

The Chamberlain laughed drily.

"She was taken ill, and could not drive a couple of hundred yards! Do you think that I do not know? . . ."

"What?" interrupted the Princess uneasily.

"The guests left the Blacha Palace only towards the morning."

"Ah! yes. . . ."

"Is it not enough? Why should she stay there? Where I am not she must not be either. I permitted her to go, for I thought it was only a question of civility. But they wish simply to take hold of her entirely, to make her join their *clique*—perhaps to arm her against me. But it shall not be! I shall not permit her to take another step without me. I shall not permit her to open her mouth. Vauban must stop her visits here. And I wonder that you should have permitted such familiarity."

"But, Anastazy!"

"Do not deny it. You have been there. I know it. Malachowski, Wybicki, and Sobolewski were there too. All Dombrowski's partisans gathered there. Do you see that I know? I know about everything, even M. de Périgord's civilities."

"Then you must know also that your charge of Chamberlain was confirmed."

The Chamberlain looked at his sister with astonishment.

"Confirmed—my charge of Chamberlain?"

"Well, yes; and this is the proof that Marie has not lost her time. The Duke de Bassano told her about it semi-officially, and she sent me to you with this news."

The Chamberlain puffed out his cheeks, rapped his snuff-box lightly, and said indifferently—

"Very much obliged for what I have long possessed."

"Yes; but the question is about the charge of Chamberlain of the Imperial Court. Perhaps it is nothing very much, but it is the first step to further honours and dignities."

"H'm! . . . it may be. Only her haste was not necessary. I told her that first of all I must have here . . . Do you understand?"

The Princess did not understand the eloquent movement of the hand from the right shoulder across the breast towards the left hip.

"Legion," explained the Chamberlain.

"I do not know . . . as it seems, it is difficult for those who are not in the army. Although . . . it will be possible for you. . . ."

That assurance tranquillised the Chamberlain, excited his

imagination, and directed his thoughts to his cherished dream about his future position.

The Princess listened silently to her brother's ambitious plans, with which she was already familiar, neither approving them nor making an opposition.

The Chamberlain spoke at length: humiliated his adversaries, distributed offices, gave advice to Napoleon—till he tired himself, coughed, and, feeling pain in his legs, seated himself in an armchair, and only then noticed the Princess's indifference.

"Why do you not speak?"

"I was listening."

"You were listening, and perhaps you disapprove? What? Do you deny it? I know that you have other views. But I must tell you that I shall not permit anybody to change my orders . . . anybody . . . perhaps you do not believe . . ."

"Entirely . . . but permit me for a moment to change the subject. I came to inform you of something."

"What is it?"

"The Grand Marshal will call on you to-day."

"Duroc will come! . . . H'm! . . . I will receive him."

"Certainly, but this time his visit may be connected with some proposition. . . ."

"And it is time for them."

"Then, dear Anastazy," continued the Princess with increasing animation, "if you remember that there is the question of the welfare of your family, that you must accommodate yourself to the circumstances, that you cannot do anything against destiny . . . If you do not lose common sense and control over yourself . . ."

"What are you aiming at?"

"I only wanted to remind you, for I do not know what the Grand Marshal . . . But I am sure it will be something of importance . . . and your behaviour will decide about our family; but it would not change the thing itself. . . . The Emperor does not know what opposition means. Opposition would only push us away from him. . . ."

The Chamberlain winked with an effort, as if wishing to concentrate all his attention.

"What opposition?"

"Ah! I do not think it will come to that. I trust too much to your experience . . . only, at all events . . ."

The Princess hesitated.

"I do not know how to say it. Well, simply a burning sentiment took hold of him!"

"Of whom?"

"Of the Emperor!"

The Chamberlain rubbed his forehead uneasily, not being able to connect the Grand Marshal's visit with the Emperor's sentiment and his family's career. Suddenly red spots appeared on his yellow face; his thin bony hand began to tug violently at his dressing-gown.

"I am sure you have noticed it yourself," said the Princess, striving to be calm. "It happened so suddenly. Even those who surround the Emperor do not think it will bring any serious results."

The Chamberlain muttered significantly, and laughed a frightful hoarse laugh.

The Princess became sincerely sorrowful, not knowing whether she should continue her persuasions or openly tell him everything.

In the meanwhile, the Chamberlain laughed continually, tugging more and more violently at his dressing-gown, and winking at his sister.

"One must think it over."

The Chamberlain bent and laughed still more.

"I see you trifle with the thing . . . although . . ."

The valet who entered the room did not permit the Princess to finish her sentence.

Baptiste handed a visiting-card to the Chamberlain on a tray.

The Chamberlain looked at the card, crumpled it in his trembling fingers, and threw it on the floor.

"What shall I answer?" asked the valet with marked surprise.

The Chamberlain pointed to the door.

The Princess picked up the card, read the name, and said impetuously to her brother: "Anastazy, consider the Grand Marshal of the Court! There is no doubt that he came with

the diploma. . . . Baptiste, introduce the Prince to the white drawing-room."

Baptiste went out.

The Chamberlain breathed heavily.

The Princess did not stop her persuasions. She depicted to him in the most glaring colours the Emperor's power; she tried to fire the Chamberlain's ambition, laying stress on the fact that opportunity would now be his to use as he would, and finally she advised him to consider the situation before taking a decision.

The last argument acted on the Chamberlain. He rose, rang for a lackey, hastily put on a swallow-tail coat, and went to the Prince of Friul.

Princess Jablonowska breathed more easily, and, having told Baptiste to let her know as soon as the Grand Marshal's visit was over, she went to Pani Walewska's apartment. Here, having called a chambermaid, she ordered the Chamberlain's wife's things to be packed at once, and given to the footman waiting at the portico. Having done this, the Princess returned to her brother's study and began to write letters.

One hour passed before the Chamberlain's quiet, tottering steps were heard.

The Princess shivered, and tried to concentrate all her presence of mind in order to endure the expected attack, and by doing so to fulfil what she considered to be her duty. She put a handkerchief imbued with a strong perfume to her mouth, leaned on the writing-desk, and waited—waited with that emotion which, in the critical moments of life, leaves only the conviction that one is right.

The Chamberlain walked swiftly, trotting along with an animation unusual to him, pressing under his arms some rolls of paper. His wig was pushed on one side, the frills of his shirt were crumpled, the collar of his dress was awkwardly uplifted on account of a red riband hanging on his neck.

Having perceived his sister, the Chamberlain stopped, handed her the roll of paper, and said: "Read it! See, and be convinced."

The Princess unrolled the paper, but the Chamberlain did not give her a chance to read it. He lifted himself on his tiptoes, and passing his hand over the red riband, which only now

could be seen entirely, said: "Look! . . . Do you see? . . . I am a commander! What? Wybicki will wither! . . . Malachowski will be drowned in his bile!"

The Princess, seeing such a change in her brother, altered her tactics at once.

"*Ah! mon cher!* I congratulate you heartily. You could hardly believe how proud and how pleased I am to see you commander of the Legion!"

"You think this is all! Read the documents. Half a million donation, and I am free from furnishing recruits to the army and from having soldiers billeted on me for the period of twenty years."

"You have deserved it all!"

"And this is only a beginning! They wish to win me by all means. But the riband! Eh?"

"Magnificent!"

"It is becoming! Eh?"

"I had a presentiment! And you were reluctant! I was persuaded that the Court had the best intentions. Permit me to congratulate you once more! I am awfully glad! If you need any further news, send for it to me."

"Are you going?"

"I must go to Vauban!"

The Chamberlain became gloomy suddenly.

"Shall you see her?"

"I am going for that purpose. I wish to tell her the news. I am sure she will be glad. Oh! . . . Yes, my dear, she wishes you well."

"Who?" asked the Chamberlain sourly.

"Vauban!"

"I am not talking about her."

The Princess turned her head.

"I am sure you do not doubt about Mary."

The Chamberlain stared at the riband.

"Not at all. But she must return! I shall send her to Walewice!"

The Princess looked with alarm at her brother.

"But only think! Send Mary to Walewice! I thought the Marshal had explained the position to you?"

"She must return at once!" said the Chamberlain with increasing irritation. "She must return, first of all; we shall see, afterwards."

"I am afraid she cannot, on account of her health. She is not well."

"No matter. Wrap her up carefully, put her in a carriage, and bring her here. Such is my wish. I shall not trouble her about what has happened, but now I demand obedience from her. Tell her that the situation has changed! I do not need them; they need me. Her help is superfluous!"

The Princess could hardly believe her ears.

"Anastazy, you forget the Emperor's sentiment."

The Chamberlain pointed proudly at the riband.

"That might be taken into consideration if I had not this proof. She will be in my way. I do not wish her to mix in politics. I shall send her to Walewice, and I shall not render an account to anybody for that."

The Princess suddenly lost all her assurance in presence of such an unexpected turn. She said a few commonplace words and departed.

The Chamberlain, after that decisive conversation, became calm. He rang for Baptiste, put on a new dark green swallow-tail coat, and began very seriously to consider how he could wear the two ribands. It was a difficult task according to the Chamberlain's refined taste, for the riband of the White Eagle was blue, and that of the Legion red, and neither should cover the other, nor should one be more visible than the other; they should both equally adorn the breast and arouse respect. After a long trial, the Chamberlain decided to put the two stars on the coat and the two ribands across the frills and the waist-coat.

The Chamberlain looked at himself several times in the mirror, and when Baptiste assured him solemnly that the ribands harmonised, he busied himself with a more important affair—with the uniform of a Chamberlain. According to Court etiquette, the Chamberlain was obliged to return thanks for the honour on the next day . . . and there was nobody who could make the uniform. The Chamberlain had already a general idea of it; he knew that it would be a tunic of red silk with

silver embroideries, with a silver key on the right pocket; a white vest, breeches of the same colour, stockings, and a three-cornered hat composed the rest of the dress, but he understood that without an engraving nobody in Warsaw could make it for him.

Baptiste, however, found means to overcome the difficulty, and proposed to go to the Castle and find the Court tailor—a Frenchman—and bring him to the Chamberlain's mansion. The Chamberlain sent his valet at once on the errand, ordering him in the meanwhile to go to Blacha Palace, and to tell his wife that in the afternoon a carriage with Dr. Wojcicki should be sent for her. A lackey was despatched for the physician.

Having remained alone, the Chamberlain took a pinch of snuff, shook his fingers and trotted to the mirror, in which he looked with satisfaction, for he found that the red riband was toned down by the blue of the White Eagle, and that the two already made him look like a senator.

The Chamberlain cleared his throat, rose on his tiptoes, came nearer the mirror, then he retreated, looked at himself from both sides; then he tried whether it would be becoming to him to put the left hand under the riband, while the right hand, holding the snuff-box, was dropped; then putting forward the left leg, he remained majestically quiet, being satisfied that such a pose would be proper for the audiences and for the receptions of important persons.

While the Chamberlain was contemplating himself, he suddenly perceived in the mirror a big red face smiling cunningly.

The Chamberlain made a movement of impatience, and in the meanwhile a voice very well known to him was heard.

"Your most humble servant, sir! I dare to present you my due congratulations."

"Ah, Bolesha!"

"The same! Always with unchanged respect, *parole d'honneur!* A little while ago I learned about the great honour that has befallen you, and I find that it was granted to the most worthy person. . . ."

"Thank you, Bolesha. Pray be seated. Would you care for some wine?"

Bolesha half closed his small, swollen eyes.

"I would not dare to trouble you, although I should be disposed to correct my opinion about your wine-cellar—or at least, to forget the headache caused by the wine I drank here last time."

The Chamberlain laughed and rang for a lackey, and when he brought a crusted bottle, Pan Walewski said jokingly: "I hope this will put you in a good humour."

"Your health! H'm! *Parole d'honneur!* it does honour to the riband."

"Ah! you have already learned that I am a commander?"

"Of course, and about the donation, too! My hearty congratulations! you who sacrificed so much, *parole d'honneur!*"

"Yes, yes!" muttered the Chamberlain, looking suspiciously at Bolesha. "Then they are already talking in the town?"

"Very much indeed! Coming here, I doubted if I could make my way through the crowds of guests. Excellent wine, exquisite! It has a *bouquet!* Ten years more, *parole d'honneur*, and it will be simply delicious! I thought I could not make my way."

"I do not receive anybody!"

"And you are right—crowd, flatteries, jealousy, empty words, and lack of . . . what you call it? ah, yes! . . . heart! I approve that solitude. In such a moment to empty a bottle of *petit vin*, that is quite different! And then, why should they hasten with congratulations? They are busy with other things. . . ."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, from early this morning a shower of honours fell from the Castle on Warsaw."

"Was anybody appointed commander?"

Bolesha moved his shoulders negligently.

"No, I have not heard about another commander."

"About what honours are you talking?"

"Then you do not know about the new body of government?"

The Chamberlain made an uneasy movement.

"What body?"

"Well, Pan Joseph Wybicki, with several others, constitute our present Government."

"It cannot be! Gossip! I do not know anything about it. The Marshal did not say one word to-day . . ."

"I wonder, for everyone knows it. For a week they were preparing that in M. Talleyrand's kitchen; to-day they simply announced the result. We, by grace of Bonaparte, Wybicki first!"

"Leave off joking, and tell me the truth! I must know it! Perhaps there is yet time. I am going to the Castle. I shall explain the matter. I shall ask for the revocation of the decision! I shall move heaven and earth, for there is an intrigue in all that! They circumvented me; they plotted without my knowledge—perhaps they used my name! I am sure they did! Speak, then! Why do you not speak?"

Bolesha caressed his broad chin, took a draught of wine, and said coolly: "There is nothing to be said! There is a commission divided into six departments!"

"But I shall protest . . . I shall not accept the office. I wish to have nothing to do with such people as Wybicki."

"H'm! H'm!" Bolesha cleared his throat gravely. "I understand that it is why they spared you fatigue."

"Then who is there—who?" inquired the Chamberlain in a trembling voice.

"Well, first of all, the luminary of the republic, Pan Joseph Wybicki," said Bolesha with a comical gravity.

"Who else?"

"Pan Ludwik Gutakowski, for nothing can happen without him; Stanislaus Count Potocki; the small brother of the great Ignacy, Piotr Bielinski, and Dzialynski; and over them that pearl of pearls, Malachowski."

"It cannot be, it cannot be!" whispered the Chamberlain with an effort.

"Unfortunately it is! To-night there will be a gala thanksgiving performance in the theatre. The Emperor promised to come with all his splendour. Only in the Blacha Palace everything is gloomy, for Pepi did not even get a riband. . . ."

Bolesha looked at the Chamberlain, and suddenly stopped.

"Perhaps you do not care? . . ."

"Speak, speak! I wish to know . . ." mumbled the Chamberlain.

"Well, there is not much more! For one day it is quite enough! There is a great commotion in town; new dignitaries are visiting each other, bowing to the Imperial valet, and promising mountains of gold to their friends. . . . As for you, you have got some consolation, *parole d'honneur*, for the new officials might be cleared out by the Prussians, while the riband and half a million will remain if Bonaparte's majesty is not killed somewhere!"

Bolesha burst into laughter, pleased with his own joke.

The Chamberlain was silent, looking thoughtlessly into space.

Bolesha did not like that silence. He emptied another glass, made a grimace, and having closed his eyes, said: "Well, you can say what you please, but we must say to ourselves that all is over with us. Yes, *finis!* We had our times! Good times, too. Do you remember when you took possession of the estate of Waree? The servants had better wine there than I to-day, although, *parole d'honneur*, it would be proper to honour the riband."

The Chamberlain spat with disgust.

"I do not want any riband!"

Bolesha laughed.

"But as they have given it, one must keep it. *Parole d'honneur*, one must!"

The Chamberlain trembled, seized the red riband and threw it on the floor.

"I do not want it. Walewski can live without that . . . that . . . impostor! Do you understand? If he prefers Dombrowski's and Malachowski's partisans, let him hold with them. Colonna Walewski has not yet fallen so low as to seek his favours. A donation to me! Let him keep it. Yes! Where is the document? Here is my answer."

He rushed to the desk on which were the diplomas, and began to tear them to pieces and trample on them.

"There is the proper place for Napoleon's favours. People like him to dare to give diplomas, while he himself could not prove that he is a nobleman! . . . Enough of him! I shall not let him into my anteroom."

"Why so hasty?" tranquillised Bolesha. "The little donation is not to be despised, and with Mme. la Chambellane's industry . . ."

The Chamberlain rang the bell furiously. Two lackeys rushed into the room.

"Send a carriage at once to Blacha Palace. Bring her ladyship. Tell her I demand it. Find Baptiste. Water! Go at once!"

The lackeys disappeared. The Chamberlain fell into an armchair, coughing.

Bolesha moved his head significantly.

"Fire! Thunderbolt! My dear Chamberlain, *parole d'honneur*, excuse my familiarity, but we have known each other for about half a century. Why so violent? Well, it seems you care so much for that little Napoleon. The best way is to be indifferent, as I am."

"I do not care. My wife will be back, and . . . to-day, immediately . . . I am going."

"In-deed? And where, if you please?"

"To Walewice, and then to Vienna; to St. Petersburg—anywhere! . . ."

"As you please; but I should consider—I should wait. . ."

"You digest very easily."

"Perhaps. The best proof is that I drink your wine."

"Pray do not mind my irritation. Will you look out of the window and see if the carriage is gone?"

Bolesha glanced into the street and said with indifference: "It is even coming back already."

"So quickly? Impossible!"

"Yes, yes; it is already here; but it seems the lady has not come."

The Chamberlain turned to the door, in which a lackey appeared.

"Where is her ladyship?"

"They said . . ."

"Have you been to the Palace?"

"Yes, my lord."

"Did you tell her ladyship?"

"They did not let me. The Countess's valet told me that her ladyship cannot come."

"What? Cannot? Give me my fur. Where is Baptiste? I am going. My fur!"

The Chamberlain, trembling and tottering, rose from the armchair and went to the door. Bolesha barred the way.

"Permit me. *Parole d'honneur,* is it worth while?"

"I must! I must! It is too much."

"H'm! it may be," said Bolesha drily, standing at the door; "but you shall not go."

"Have you become a madman?"

"For . . . they will not let you into the Blacha Palace."

"Who will not let me in?"

"Well, even I. You are excited, and your wife is not well."

"And is it any concern of yours?"

"Not altogether; but as I am anxious to drink another bottle, a better one, therefore the duty of a host . ."

The Chamberlain looked stupidly on Bolesha's impudently smiling face.

"You are crazy . . ."

"We will speak about that later on. And now, *parole d'honneur,* be seated, otherwise I shall be obliged to be impolite."

The Chamberlain stretched out his arm to the bell, but Bolesha anticipated him.

"Permit me . . . shall I ring once more?"

The Chamberlain had not time to reply, for four Imperial gendarmes appeared in the room.

"How do you like that? Well, before all, I have the honour to inform you that I am here in the capacity of an official. Then I dare to warn you that I have an order to keep you in your house."

"Bolesha, I shall order . . ."

"Be seated," muttered the Chamberlain's former companion, brutally pushing him towards a chair. "So; sit down and listen, remembering that for you I am Chevalier de Bolesha, that I have been a chamberlain like you, although I have not gathered as much money as you did, for I never offered my guests such bad wine as you do, *parole d'honneur!* Do not sniff, do not gnash your teeth—for there are not so many of them left—and accommodate yourself. Do not think of any scenes, for your wife has no time. Do you see those strapping fellows? I have two score like that under my command. Do you wish

to listen to my advice? Ask for a divorce—be *galant, parole d'honneur!*"

The Chamberlain trembled in his armchair, breathing with difficulty.

Bolesha rose slowly, sent away the gendarmes, called a lackey, and ordered a glass of water; then he said quietly—

"Are you better now? If you are going to be reasonable, then I will explain to you. Eh?"

The Chamberlain nodded with an effort.

"Very well, for Bolesha is not a murderer. I do not wish to wrong you, *parole d'honneur,* but to help you. Only you do not understand my kindness and your own good. Speaking shortly, the Emperor is madly in love with your wife. Therefore, you cannot make war with him. Take what he gives, ask for more, and treat Bolesha to an honest bottle."

"I do not wish for anything!"

"Yes, yes; and where is your common sense? Well, you are sorry to lose such a wife! I do not contradict. But it could not be otherwise. Do you remember your frolics? And that Italian girl, Chiarini, from the circus, and Pani Szwejkowska, and Malgosia Sitko! I shall not name the others, for I am not a register; only I come to the conclusion that now your turn has come. You wanted a young wife. Well, *sic transit, parole d'honneur!* Bless the fate that sent you such an adorer, and make terms with him. It is done! And there is nothing bad, *parole d'honneur,* in all that. You had only bother with your wife. You will become quiet, and all is over. There is the whole truth!"

"Scoundrels!"

"Yes, yes; *parole d'honneur,* it will do you good."

"I will not permit myself to be divorced. I shall put her into a convent."

"My dear sir, you have already done so; you have signed a consent for divorce."

"I—I?"

"*Parole d'honneur,* I have seen it."

"It is false!"

"Another argument. You have forgotten how those things are done. They have your consent and your signature as well

as your wife's. The papers will be sent to the right place, and —*finis!* I am sorry to be obliged to explain all that to you. *Parole d'honneur,* if anybody had told me that I should become your nurse, I should have challenged him. Well, well! I shall be all right here, for there is some wine in your cellar, and I understand you brought your *chef* from Walewice."

The Chamberlain's face became green like that of a corpse.

"Bolesha," said he quietly, "send for Ksawery; I am going to Walewice to-day. I do not wish to know about anything. . . . Ungrateful! I have reared a snake! I shall dictate a letter to her; let her do what she pleases. . . . I must see Ksawery. . . ."

"H'm! h'm! It will be difficult. I do not say in a few days. . . ."

"I return to-day to Walewice!"

"Why should you hasten? It is very cold now, and the roads are crowded with army transports so that it is impossible to pass."

"I return," persisted the Chamberlain with a trembling voice. "I have nothing to do here. Send me Ksawery! I shall tell him what to do. Bolesha, do you hear me? Remember our old friendship. I must return. I am not well. I do not wish to hear of anybody. They have deceived me; you see that—they have sent me you here!"

Bolesha cleared his throat with a comical gravity, and stretched out his arm with a snuff-box to the Chamberlain.

"H'm! As you are talking so nicely . . . then I answer as to my own brother. Pan Ksawery will come to see you in a few days. Now he has no time, for if he loses an opportunity, then, *parole d'honneur,* he will not be able to catch that office after which he is hunting. As to Walewice, you must wait!"

"Then am I a prisoner? I am going alone. I shall not force anybody. . . . Even should she return, I would set my dogs at her. I will not see her any more!"

His voice changed into an ominous hiss; foam covered his mouth. Bolesha sighed.

"*Hic jacet lepus!* You are righteously angry, but you must remember about the splendour of the Roman descent of your family; a glorious name . . . you must protect it from evil tongues; you must preserve appearances; you must not injure decency. . . ."

"What? You mercenary wretch . . . you will dare preach to Colonna Walewski?" shouted the Chamberlain, rising.

Bolesha grunted ironically.

"Certainly, certainly; *parole d'honneur* you will stay here, you will get well, and when the attack of madness is over you shall return to Walewice. You boast that you know all about the Court, and you do not know that if *l'Empereur* deigned to bestow on you such an honour, and if you do not want to go to the Castle to thank him for it, then you cannot show yourself in the streets with your boxes to delight the mob; you can only wait discreetly, and when the time comes you can go. For the sake of safety I shall conduct you myself."

"Scoundrel! Scoundrel! Hang me then!" moaned the Chamberlain in wrath.

Bolesha became gloomy, his eyes shone like fire. He called a lackey and ordered the Chamberlain to be taken to bed, threatening to call in gendarmes if his will were not carried out.

The Chamberlain tried to resist. He called his servants; then he weakened, and wished to arrange the matter with Bolesha peacefully; then again he was furious. He swore and wanted to get rid of the guardian imposed on him.

Bolesha, however, was unmoved.

Gendarmes were posted at all the doors, and without Bolesha's permission nobody could go out of the mansion.

The Chamberlain was cut off from the world. The guests that would come from time to time were received by Bolesha, and were sent away with the assurance that the Chamberlain and his wife were either at Princess Jablonowska's or Princess Radziwil's, or at M. Talleyrand's reception.

The guests would look at Bolesha doubtfully, would ask him to express their compliments and the assurance of the most hearty regard, and would go away smiling.

In the meanwhile the Chamberlain had a fever, which slackened towards evening. This was followed by an absolute torpor. He was stubbornly silent; he did not complain of any ailment; his silence was in harmony with the tranquillity that reigned supreme in the mansion, hardly disturbed by the servants' whispering, by the measured steps of the guards, and

the quiet laughter of Bolesha, who was enjoying himself in drinking.

While the Walewski mansion was quiet, dark, and deserted, Mme. de Vauban's apartment in the Blacha Palace was crowded, brilliant and full of animation; Mme. de Vauban's drawing-rooms were thronged with guests. Fryne Czosnowska, together with Countess Moszynska, were doing the honours of the house, entertaining guests, excusing the hostess, who appeared only when a valet, posted at the entrance to the further apartment, told her that some one of importance had come.

Then Mme. de Vauban would come with long steps, would smile gravely and speak with a subdued, mysterious voice.

The topic of conversation was the current news that interested everyone, but in spite of all the interesting details which allowed of so many suppositions, commentaries, and deductions, in spite of perennial subjects such as Napoleon's decree about the new Government, the dazzling majesty of the Emperor, his favours and his way of living, the conversation in Mme. de Vauban's drawing-rooms would often break off, would change into a whisper, would be limited to eloquent looks, and by its lack of order and continuity would arouse the involuntary supposition that these people were thinking about something other than what they were talking about.

When Mme. de Vauban appeared, the ladies would surround her, the gentlemen would draw nearer, and all would hold their breath as soon as she began to talk. When she ended a sentence there was silence, for they expected that she would say something more.

But Mme. de Vauban did not say one word too much, although by her gestures, by the expression round her mouth, and her emphasis on certain words, she made them understand that she had some great secret which she would like to share with everybody, but that she must respect its sanctity.

If, however, Mme. de Vauban was without a rival in her rôle of Sphinx, Princess Jablonowska excited curiosity even in the most indifferent. She, like Mme. de Vauban, avoided conversation, was silent at questions, and hardly answered the courtesies of the ladies and the respectful bows of the gentlemen; but, in the meanwhile, she knew how to throw out some

apparently insignificant words, and by this means to keep up continual expectation.

From time to time Countess Moszynska, who tried to tone herself up to her friends and fulfil the duties of a hostess with a dignity corresponding to the moment, would rush to the Princess and riddle her with questions. But instead of answers, she would receive only the pressure of a hand or a warm assurance.

"How much I would give if I could only speak!"

"I understand; but I think that with me . . ."

"I have no secrets; it is only the danger of emotion."

"Then Pani Walewska is here?"

"My dearest, she is where she would not dream of being!"

"And the Emperor?"

"I have not seen him these two hours."

"These two hours?" whispered Countess Moszynska astonished; but before she could comprehend the importance of such an answer, the Princess disappeared into the other part of the apartments.

Those half words did not solve the riddle, but were sufficient, however, to furnish material for gossip and stories, in which the principal figures were Napoleon and Pani Walewska, while Gorayski, the Chamberlain, Duroc, Roustan, and Bassano were secondary.

Among the Frenchmen there were some who could throw some light on the Emperor's intentions, and even solve the riddle; but some of them, like Talleyrand, avoided questions; others, like Bassano, were silent when any one made an allusion to Pani Walewska; still others, like Duroc, had witty subterfuges at their disposition. The latter, however, was threatened by a plot made by Countess Lubienska, Pani Sobolowska, and Anetka Tyszkiewicz, who had determined to attack the Marshal with the charm of their extraordinary beauty and exceedingly sharp tongues. And before Duroc was aware, he was surrounded and pushed along the slippery roads of conversation. The Marshal smiled, answered, avoided all allusions, but, notwithstanding all his ability, he did not rebuff Anetka Tyszkiewicz.

"Marshal," said Anetka boldly, "why do you avoid conversation about what interests us so much?"

"I . . . avoid?" answered Duroc freely. "But until now you did not say anything about the new Government."

"Nor do I wish to speak about it."

"Then you think . . ."

"That we are in the constellation of the Louis, and, therefore, among rising stars."

"I have no ideas about astronomy!"

"But you do not deny its existence?"

"I state only my ignorance."

"Even if I were to lament Mme. Walewska's absence?"

"Yes," answered Duroc drily.

"After such a postive answer I should capitulate, but I am not like the Ulm fortress which, as it seems, surrendered yesterday without a shot."

"The Ulm fortress?" repeated Duroc, who did not understand the wickedness of the joke.

"Yes, yes!" assured Anetka with comical gravity. "It surrendered without a shot; hoisted the white flag at the first summons. In a word, a new success. It is a wonder that General Gauvion did not order the news to be announced by cannons. Kostusia Lubienska assures that it was due to the fear that the Chamberlain Walewski has not only the Legion, but also a fever, and that cannon-shots might injure his health."

Pani Sobolowska and Countess Lubienska burst out with laughter.

Duroc recovered his self-possession.

"You underrate the capacity of the defence of the fortress of Ulm."

"I mention only the quickness of its capitulation."

"Notwithstanding our superior forces! You forget that there are some fortresses that would like to have an opportunity of surrendering. But in vain, for nobody pays any attention to them."

Anetka became red.

"You meant to say that access to them is too difficult."

"On the contrary. But while an extraordinary general is necessary to take such a fortress as Ulm—M. de Flahaut, let us say—the Prince of Berg's aide-de-camp could manage another fortress."

At that bold turn of Duroc's Anetka became confused and lost ground. The allusion was too evident. The Marshal assumed his ordinary affability and changed the subject of conversation.

Towards the evening Mme. de Vauban's guests began to take leave in order to meet again in a few hours in the theatre, where a gala performance was to be given.

Mme. de Vauban gave instructions to Fryne how she should act during her absence, and, having dressed, left the palace.

As to Fryne, she, having given the servant orders about supper for Pani Walewska, quietly entered the room occupied by the Chamberlain's wife.

Quiet and darkness which Fryne found in the room made her timid. She looked round the room, and, perceiving Pani Walewska sitting in an armchair, came quietly towards her.

"Do I not disturb you?"

Pani Walewska shivered.

"Who is there? A . . . it is you! . . . I did not recognise you."

"How happy I am that I can be with you. Will you permit me to stay?"

Pani Walewska nodded.

"Thank you so much. I am so happy. But why are you so sad? Ah! . . . if I were in your place! . . ."

"So you think."

"I am sure. Only to think! Ah! no one speaks of anything but you; and then they are afraid whether you will be kind to them, whether you will honour them with a smile. Upon my word! But you are not angry with me?"

"No, I am not; but you must not talk like that to me."

Fryne, however, could not refrain from prattling. Pani Walewska wished to avoid her indiscreet questions and remarks, but Fryne, notwithstanding her assurances that she would not dare to touch upon a subject disagreeable to Pani Walewska, that she was not inquisitive, would constantly return to the same subject.

Pani Walewska was already losing her patience, when Fryne's loquacity was interrupted by the valet, who came to ask whether he should bring a box sent to Pani Walewska.

Pani Walewska consented, thinking that her husband had sent some of her belongings.

The box was brought and put in a corner of the room, and the key was handed to Pani Walewska in a sealed envelope.

"Pray, be so kind," said Pani Walewska to Fryne, "as to open the box; there must be some handkerchiefs."

Fryne tore open the envelope, did not notice a small piece of paper that fell out of it, went to the box, and opened it.

"There are only jewellery boxes. What a lovely necklace!"

Pani Walewska shrugged her shoulders, thinking that her husband had sent her the family jewels.

"Leave it. What an idea of Anastazy's! The handkerchiefs must be at the bottom."

"No; there are more jewellery boxes. An emerald necklace!"

"You must be mistaken!"

"There is a ruby necklace and a pearl necklace! O Lord! what riches! Earrings, bracelets, rings!"

Pani Walewska rose from her chair.

"What is the matter with you? It cannot be!"

Fryne did not hear, and continued to bring out other costly things.

"What a big diamond in that ring! Topazes! Lovely! A mirror! A whole gold toilet set! I never saw such riches in my life!"

Pani Walewska rose and came to the box, and was staggered by the dazzling of precious stones, gold, and silver.

"Those things do not belong to me. Where did they come from?"

"Magnificent! beautiful! superb! One could not dream of better ones. And that locket! It opens. . . . Look! . . . a miniature!"

"Whose? Let me see it!"

"The Emperor! How beautiful he is! Look!"

Pani Walewska glanced at the miniature. Fryne did not notice her confusion, for she was looking with ecstasy and avidity at the jewels, screaming with delight and surprise.

Pani Walewska was silent.

Fryne, having satisfied her curiosity, clasped her hands and said with naïve jealousy: "O Lord, what riches you have!"

Pani Walewska smiled sadly.

"You are a big baby. Do not grieve, for all that is not mine."

"But the valet said . . ."

"Impossible!"

"I know—I understand. The Emperor sent them as a present."

"To me! The Emperor?" said Pani Walewska, in a hollow voice, feeling that Fryne's words confirmed her own suspicions.

"For certain," continued Fryne, and having noticed on the floor the small piece of paper, read it, and cried triumphantly, "I have a proof! read it: 'To the best among the most beautiful. This is sent by her devoted N.'"

"It cannot be."

"But yes, yes, dear Madame! Let me kiss you! How happy you must be!"

Pani Walewska got rid of Fryne's embraces, and returned with tottering steps to her chair, while Fryne continued her raptures over the jewels.

The entrance of Mme. de Vauban's valet did not disturb Fryne. The valet waited at the door, and not having heard the question on what errand he came, he went to Fryne and announced solemnly: "His Excellency the Speaker Malachowski wishes to see her ladyship, Pani Walewska."

"Ah! What? Very well," said Fryne.

"Shall I show him in?"

"Yes. Why not?"

The valet went away. Fryne suddenly became thoughtful, and came to Pani Walewska.

"Malachowski was announced; perhaps I was wrong. Vauban told me not to let anybody in."

"Who?" asked Pani Walewska, as if waked up from a slumber.

"Malachowski—the Speaker. He wishes to see you."

"I must be excused. I cannot, not for anything. I do not wish to see anybody."

"Then I must excuse you."

Fryne was rushing to the door to call a lackey, when Malachowski appeared at it.

"You must excuse, sir; Pani Walewska cannot . . ."

Malachowski hardly nodded to Fryne.

Pani Walewska rose. Fryne tried to save the situation.

"Pani Walewska is not well—the valet made a mistake. . . ."

"I shall not fatigue you with a long conversation," said Malachowski, turning to Pani Walewska, who nodded affirmatively. Fryne went out.

Malachowski seated himself opposite Pani Walewska and said gravely: "Pray excuse my intrusion, but at this important moment we cannot stand on ceremony. From early this morning I have been wishing to see you, and the news that is going about increased my impatience. But they did not let me in, and if it were not for Poniatowski I should not have been able to be here. You are acting very wisely. It is better to avoid the crowd."

The Speaker became silent, as if waiting for a reply. His large grey eyes, full of good feeling, were turned on Pani Walewska, who was sitting motionless looking into space.

"I came hoping that you have something to tell me. And perhaps it is all gossip? Perhaps you did not go yesterday? You have not seen him yet?"

"I have," whispered Pani Walewska.

"And what? Have you anything to tell me?"

Pani Walewska laughed spasmodically.

Malachowski dropped his head.

"Do not wrongly interpret my questioning of you, but it is a matter of the greatest importance to our country. We are losing ground under our feet; we do not know what this new Government means—hence my intrusion. You say you have seen him? H'm! It is a very important circumstance. How did you find him disposed towards you? Was he pleased?"

Pani Walewska suddenly shook off the stupor, stretched out her arms in the direction of the boxes glittering with jewels, and said with an outburst: "Look there! Look! Do you think it is not enough?"

Malachowski looked in the direction pointed out to him and grew pale.

"Unusual magnificence! But you must not think of it. In our calculations it is a proof that we can demand still greater sacrifices."

"You think so?" cried Pani Walewska ironically.

Undoubtedly."

"Then learn . . . I went to the Castle . . . I said everything . . . I fell at his feet when he was promising me the most splendid future."

"And he?"

"He? Do you see those blue marks—here, on my hands? . . . Is it not enough? Must I display my whole disgrace to you? And that magnificence, does it not satisfy you?"

Pani Walewska began to cry.

"Do not lose your courage. Become stronger."

"Enough, sir! I am not made for your plans. Look for another woman. I am burnt by my disgrace. You have stolen from me even what little peace I had. You exposed me to opprobrium. He did not let me say a word. He insulted me; and you dreamed about my influence. Why did you push me to that? What have I done to you?"

"Your reproaches are awful. God is my witness that I acted against my own conscience, that I was ashamed of the means. But you shall be avenged. Bonaparte has shown his cards. Your unsuccessful enterprise has its importance; it is sad and gloomy, but great. I promise to avenge you. Napoleon has calculated badly. We shall resist the French wave—we shall seek help elsewhere. Yesterday he threw a gauntlet to you. I pick it up. I know now what his evasive words meant; we shall not try any more to guess their meaning."

Pani Walewska wiped her tears. The Speaker's steely voice frightened her. She neither understood exactly the meaning of his words nor the hidden threats, but she felt that because of her, something that threatened Napoleon—that hero, conqueror, warrior of her dreams—would happen.

Pani Walewska was frightened at that thought, not knowing why. The Emperor had wronged her awfully; he had ruined her peace, her dreams, had taken her honour. She would avoid him, but why should she avenge herself? Had she had Mme. de Vauban's experience, had she had courage, had she known how to act, who knows, perhaps Napoleon would have been different. Everything was against her. Even that meeting with Ornano, and Constant, and even that guard—all seemed to have conspired to make her lose her self-possession.

Those thoughts passed quickly through Pani Walewska's mind, dried up tears, and prompted her to protest.

"What is done," she said to Malachowski, "cannot be undone. Forget me. My life was very unhappy even before. I do not wish to be a cause of battle."

Malachowski was surprised. "What do you mean?"

"I beg of you to forget me, and to permit me to forget. Such is my lot. Give up vengeance; do not pronounce even my name; let me return to oblivion. Yes, yes, in one hour I lived years. You are the first and the last to whom I have complained. I trust to your honour that you will not repeat it to anybody else, that you will not draw any conclusions from my words, that you will not use them for any action; for I am feeble, for I am not capable even of expressing myself well. It is too much for me—too much!"

"You are mistaken. I would not dare to hurt you; only what you have told me convinces me . . ."

"But . . ."

"It is so, undoubtedly. Napoleon did not want to promise anything, even to you, in the moment when he felt how much he could please you! Is a better argument necessary? Napoleon does not possess that amount of hypocrisy which anybody else in his place would have. And we and Wybicki—thousands of us—dazzled by him, wish to follow him! We thought that he would share his thoughts in regard to our country with you. But he did not say anything, because he does not intend to do anything for us. He arouses hopes, and then he will sell us in a treaty. Do you think that it is agreeable for me to come to such a conclusion? No, no! I would prefer to trust Napoleon!"

Malachowski breathed heavily.

"He will take all our money, the last piece of our bread, all our men fit for fighting, and he will leave our country exhausted, hungry, devoid of arms capable of work. We must stop that; we must defend ourselves; and in that defence you shall be avenged too!"

Malachowski rose, looked at the clock, and added: "I must go to the theatre. Excuse me for having troubled you. Accept my thanks for your good will and self-sacrifice."

Pani Walewska was rubbing her forehead, looking in a stupefied way at the Speaker.

"And should you need my help or advice, I am always at your command. I shall never forget your noble behaviour. We were bold, and aimed high; we failed, but we came out victorious just the same. I would advise you to go away—immediately, to Vienna! You will be quieter there. I will send you some one who will arrange the journey for you. . . . The Prince and the Princess de Ligny will do everything for you. You must run away, for now it is that you are in danger—now you will be obliged to become a common favourite. My respect . . ."

Malachowski bent his head and went towards the door.

Pani Walewska rushed from her seat and crossed his way.

"One word more!"

Malachowski looked at Pani Walewska's transparent, pale face, and said, with paternal benevolence—

"Speak, pray. . . ."

Pani Walewska pressed her breast as if wishing to stop its heaving.

"I will do anything for you," said Malachowski.

"I did not tell you the truth," said Pani Walewska, in a muffled voice.

"What?"

"I have not seen the Emperor!"

"You are joking. I know you have been in the Castle. I know even that Corvisart brought you here."

"Then, yes, I have been there, but I did not say even one word about what you told me. I lacked courage, will, daring."

"Reflect. . . . A minute ago you accused him. . . ."

"Because I wished to justify myself, because I wanted to get rid of that mission."

Malachowski looked at her in bewilderment.

"And you did not ask him for anything?"

"No," whispered Pani Walewska through her set teeth.

"Then, why did you promise? Why did you deceive me?"

"I do not know. I wanted . . . Do not ask me! Forget about me. Do not count on me."

Malachowski laughed ironically.

"Ha, ha! You say you did not have courage! But you had courage to ask for those things!"

"Yes."

"You are paid, and you think it is enough!"

"Yes."

Malachowski drew himself up proudly.

"Excuse my mistake! I value your sincerity; and should you be in need, you can ask me to pay for your trouble in gold."

Pani Walewska gasped, wanted to say something to defend herself, to parry the insult thrown at her, but Malachowski was gone.

Pani Walewska was seized with an access of madness. She rushed to the boxes and began to destroy them, to break the necklaces, to scatter the pearls and precious stones on the floor, making her hands bleed. A desire for destruction took hold of her. When there were no more jewels in the boxes she tore her silk gown, clenched her fingers on her own hands; she pulled at her abundant hair. She seemed to seek physical pain to balance her moral suffering that penetrated her and burned her.

After this attack she was overcome little by little by a stupor —an unconsciousness of what was going on around her. She saw Fryne's frightened face bending over her; she heard her voice; she felt the touch of her soft hands; she could distinguish in the shadows the silhouette of moving servants, but she could not account for all that.

She could not explain to herself why the chambermaids were coming to her, why they dressed her, who put on her neck that locket.

Only when everything became quiet round her, Pani Walewska came to her senses, passed her hand over her face and felt the tears.

Was she crying? Was it true that the Speaker had been to see her? But she was not crying. Why should she? She had acted like a child. It was not necessary to permit him to talk like that. She should have been silent. What were Malachowski and others to her? She must remain alone with her grief, pain, and disenchantment; for notwithstanding her

interior fight, she wished for the voice of common sense and conscience. And that desire was so sudden, so powerful, so dizzying that she could not resist it. She had committed an unpardonable fault—almost a crime! But they tempted her so much by displaying to her such magnificent pictures of the future. She defended herself as much as she could, but not enough, not as she should have done. Her duty was not to have confidence in her own strength. It was she who had attempted to bar his way. He trampled upon her and threw into her face a handful of jewels, and to-day he had already forgotten that he had broken one more life, that he had annihilated one more existence.

Pani Walewska trembled.

And she had imagined to herself that he was different. He trampled on her, he insulted her, he did not wish even to respect that beautiful portrait of himself, that she had engraved in her heart with the most exalted thoughts, that portrait which she had worshipped with every drop of her blood. For years and years the figure of that magnificent commander, that general of nations, had been growing in her mind. For years and years fantastic stories, adorning him with legendary wreaths, surrounding him with rainbow-like hues, had been coming to her. For years and years she had heard Napoleon's name pronounced in her father's house with respect. It had taken years and years to personify Napoleon in her mind as a genius, as an idol. Then came that awful moment in which she learnt the merciless truth. Why did it come? Why did it rob her of such a beautiful dream?

Pani Walewska sighed.

The spell had disappeared, and the person to whom from her childhood she had wished the greatest good had done her the greatest wrong.

But perhaps it was her own fault; perhaps she was too bold in fulfilling the promise given to the Speaker of the Diet.

Had she followed Ornano's advice at once; had she not been too late only by one minute; had she valued Gorayski's warnings! But it had to be. She was punished for her longings, for her dreams, for her complaints against the loneliness of Walewice.

Pani Walewska was surrounded by quiet and darkness. She was overpowered by the feeling of boundless solitude and isolation. She had nobody—nobody would know and understand her secret grief, bitterness, and tears. Her husband, Mme. de Vauban, Fryne, Anetka Tyszkiewicz, Herceau, Malachowski, the Princess her sister-in law, Constant, Princess Radziwil, Corvisart, her family, and even perhaps her own brother, would condemn her, and would be persuaded that they were right to do so. And for her there would remain that fearful quiet, for she had nobody, nobody! . . . They are still fondling her and cringing to her, for they still think yet that she will be able to get something for them. . . .

Pani Walewska laughed spasmodically. Her strained thoughts became slower and slower.

Suddenly she felt that some one had touched her hand. And this touch was soft but firm, a touch so familiar to her that she could hardly refrain from screaming.

Her first thought was that she had a vision, and she wanted to defend herself against it.

But the touch was repeated, and with it a whisper resounded, a whisper that froze Pani Walewska's blood.

"Mary, forgive me! . . . I am very guilty," was the whisper. "I shall do everything in order to reward you for that moment. Do not put me away. Madness took hold of me. I thought that it would suffice to have you in order to quench my love, which made my heart throb for you! Forgive me. Look! I humble myself before you—I beseech you!"

Pani Walewska opened her eyes wide.

At her feet Napoleon was kneeling!

She covered her face with her hands.

"O Lord! What have I done? Was I not punished already?"

"Child, think it over. I avow my mistake, and I beg. Permit me to deserve forgiveness, permit me to love you, permit me to be proud of you. Your beauty had intoxicated me. Child, remember how many storms I have to face. Remember that I have not for me such a soft little hand as is yours, which would smooth my brow. Yes, yesterday I wanted to break my fetters, which you put on me; yesterday by one outburst of passion, I thought to be able to put down the flames

devouring me. And to-day I return—I bend before you conquered, in love, sorry for your sadness, humiliated. . . . Mary, tell me that you forgive me!"

Pani Walewska rose, stretched herself, and said quietly—

"Sire, your wish is for me a command. But I have nothing to forgive."

Bonaparte got up quietly.

"Do not speak to me like that. Forget my crown and sceptre, for I wish you to talk to me as to one who loves thee."

Pani Walewska leaned on a table, feeling that her legs bent under her.

"I also, Sire, try to believe that, for I cannot think that I have spoken with the Emperor—with Napoleon."

Bonaparte frowned; fiery sparks shone in his eyes and disappeared under frowning eyebrows.

"You are bold, too bold; and, perhaps, too severe. You do not think what my coming to you means."

"It is true, Sire; it is an honour for me."

Bonaparte took Pani Walewska's hand.

"Mary, forget. Do not wound me. Have pity on yourself, and I will not let you forget your kindness."

"Undoubtedly, Sire, you know how to be magnificent!"

Napoleon bit his lips.

"What is the meaning of your irony? Tell me, why do you force yourself to keep a courtly distance between us? Why do you not answer with your heart? Why are not you sincere?"

"I am afraid of hurting you, Sire."

"I demand frankness. Speak! I do not wish you to have even a shadow of grief against me. Forget about the Emperor; he came here, not to command, but to beg. Do tell me everything you wish for."

"Very well," answered Pani Walewska shortly, and she rang the bell.

"What do you intend?"

"I do what you authorised me, Sire."

The valet appeared at the door.

"Who brought those jewels?" asked Pani Walewska drily.

"A soldier of the Guard; there was a valet from the Castle . . . they said . . ."

"Enough! Put the small boxes in the big one; lock it up, give me the key, and carry the box at once to the Grand Marshal of the Court of his Imperial Majesty!"

The valet, abashed by the Emperor's presence, awkwardly fulfilled the order, and left the room with the box.

Pani Walewska turned to the Emperor.

"And now, Sire, pray take the key."

"But, child," said Bonaparte, embarrassed by an ending to the proceeding so incomprehensible to him, "they must have given you my note. I took the liberty of sending you those trifles, with the intention of giving you a proof of my thoughts of you."

Pani Walewska drew herself up proudly.

"I cannot accept them!"

"But . . ."

"It is so, Sire; it is too much for Walewska, and too little for a Polish lady."

Bonaparte folded his arms upon his breast.

"I can be munificent only to Walewska."

"That being the case, Sire, she cannot accept anything from you!"

"Then, not being able to obtain your price, you reject my love; you do not care for me!"

Pani Walewska blushed.

"No, Sire," she said in a whisper; "only if my request could not be granted, then do not think about presents—let me be neither richer nor poorer than I am."

Napoleon seized her hand and pressed it to his lips.

"But permit me to become rich by having you! Speak!"

The tears appeared in Pani Walewska's eyes.

"Whose can I call myself since yesterday?"

Bonaparte's face beamed.

"A hundred times good! You shall be the star of my new better life. . . . Mary! love and trust me! What seems to-day to be a fable, what reason declares impossible, that I promise you to embrace with my hearty willingness! In exchange for your love, I promise to follow your ideals!"

CHAPTER XIII

THE cannons became silent at Tchew.

A gloomy February night had stopped the bloody victory of the Polish legions, and did not permit the victors to pursue the retreating Prussians.

Decimated regiments lay down on snow hardened by frost, gathering round camp fires, satisfying their hunger and thirst with the consciousness of their victory and with the hope of the Emperor's praise, of crosses and advancement.

Not far from the house occupied by the commandant-in-chief a group of officers were chatting with animation, recollecting episodes from the battle.

"The Colonel!" suddenly exclaimed Lieutenant Lonczynski, jumping to his feet.

The others followed his example.

A tall man wrapped in a cloak was coming from the direction of a house.

"Who is mounting guard over the camps?" asked the Colonel.

"The captain of the second regiment of infantry, Chlusowich!" answered a voice from the fire quickly.

"Is Major Konsinowski here? Ah! it is you! Very well! And Lieutenant Lonczynski! Look, I have brought the report from Pakosh to show it to you. Come near the fire! Listen: 'Paul Lonczynski, lieutenant of the Italian Legion, lately transferred from Marshal Davoust's army corps, three times reported for promotion in the last seven years, to-day charged a Prussian battery with half a squadron of horse, and took a cannon alone; he is reported for promotion and reward.' I hope it is enough?"

"Thank you, sir!" said the Major; "he deserves such a recommendation."

"I am very much obliged to you, sir," added Lonczynski, smiling slightly.

"You must thank yourself," said the Colonel, putting out his hand to Lonczynski. "I have done an agreeable duty. Now, I am sure, you will get the long-deserved epaulettes."

Lonczynski had no time to answer, for the door of the house occupied by the general staff opened briskly, and an officer, turning to the Colonel, said hastily: "The Emperor's courier, sir. Major, and you, lieutenant, to the General at once!"

"The deuce!" said the Major through his set teeth. "I am sure, some change in the service!"

"I do not think so; it is something about you."

"About me?" answered Lonczynski doubtfully.

They entered the house occupied by the staff and generals.

In the first room, in which several aides-de-camp were sitting at two tables, the lieutenant was asked to wait.

Lonczynski greeted the officers, who answered by muttering something, and went to the fireplace; but he had not time to warm himself, for the Colonel came out from the other room and asked him in.

Lonczynski followed the Colonel; grey-headed General Gielgud rose from behind a table.

"Lieutenant Lonczynski!" introduced the Colonel.

"I am glad to see you," said the General, putting his hands out, "and still more glad to congratulate you on the particular favour of the Emperor."

"I do not understand . . ."

"We did our best to-day with the Colonel in the report about you, but, in the meanwhile, they remembered you better in Warsaw. Your road lies open to the most brilliant career. I have heard much good about you, therefore I do not wonder at the great honour that has befallen you. I am glad of it with my whole heart."

"Really, sir," said the lieutenant hesitatingly, "I do not understand. . . ."

Gielgud opened a longish box standing on the table.

"Lieutenant Lonczynski, the Emperor's courier has brought you these epaulettes. You are appointed colonel to the general staff; you are called to be near his Majesty."

"I . . . I . . . sir?"

"Here is the appointment and the command calling you to headquarters."

The lieutenant passed his hand over his eyes, as if wishing to clear away a nightmare.

"I—a colonel! It is impossible!"

The General stroked his abundant white hair, and smiled benevolently.

"I am pleased with your surprise, for it means that you deserve the reward honestly."

The Colonel helped Lonczynski to take off his cloak, took off his lieutenant's epaulettes and put on those of a colonel.

The General looked, and approved joyfully.

"They are very becoming to you. You are now a man of importance all at once. General staff! The Emperor's headquarters! It is a great honour to us all. It appears they think of us. But this is not all. Here is the cross, and five hundred napoleons for equipment."

Lonczynski reddened, paled, grew blue by turns. He looked stupefied at the rich silver epaulettes, the Legion of Honour, and at the gold, and could not gather up his thoughts. He could not account for such a peculiar favour of the Emperor. For years he had not been able to get the long-deserved promotion to the rank of captain; had had no pay for two years, and lived on the money sent to him by his sister, Pani Walewska. And here, all at once, the Emperor's courier brought him the post of a colonel in the general staff, a cross, and money. The thought came to his mind that there must be some mistake.

"But it is impossible," said he; "it must be some one else!"

The General took snuff, and said positively: "Not at all. With the diploma is a paper on which is your father's name and place of your birth, and this is evidently sent that there should be no doubt whatever. Yes, yes; Dombrowski was a little surprised that you should jump over three grades, but he was glad, and he begs of you to take with you, as you are going to see the Emperor, the report about yesterday's fight, as he would like to spare every officer. And I suppose you will be pleased to present such thanks to the Emperor."

Having advised the newly appointed colonel to go the next day to Liebstadt, he took leave of him.

Hardly had the grey winter morning come, when the news about the Imperial courier was already being commented upon throughout the camp.

Some officers expressed their jealousy frankly; the others tried maliciously to find the cause of such a sudden distinction; still others—these were Lonczynski's friends—rejoiced heartily; but they wondered just the same.

The oldest soldiers, who remembered Napoleon when he was as poor as they were now, had never heard of such rapid promotion. It was true that such of his satellites as Berthier, Murat, Bessières, Lannes, and even Lefèbvre had passed the military grades quickly, but it was an unheard of thing that a special courier should be sent to an ordinary officer, who had never had the chance to be at Bonaparte's side, and never had been spoken of by him.

Lonczynski's appointment would have been justified if he had a great historical name, if he had a powerful family, if he had accomplished some extraordinary deed.

Lonczynski was appreciated as a capable and brave officer, but men like him, and, perhaps, more capable of commanding, were very numerous.

If, however, the surprise in the Polish Legion was great, the shock experienced by the lieutenant himself was as strong, and it increased in proportion as he sought after the cause of such a favour of fortune.

A captain's rank would have filled him with contentment and pride, would have fulfilled his hopes and dreams, and a soldier's cross would have been a sufficient reward for his hardships.

But the epaulettes of a colonel spoiled his pleasure, did not permit him even to answer properly his comrades' congratulations, filled him with a kind of shame towards his former superiors.

And then, notwithstanding hearty words and vigorous handshakes, the lieutenant felt that there was something in his comrades' behaviour which made his blood rush to his face, which the red riband of the Legion changed into some reproach, an evident mark of blind fate, a wrong to the others.

The lieutenant passed the night in feverish excitement, in bashfully looking at his epaulettes, in reading the diplomas, in wondering whether it was not all a dream, a hallucination.

After the first sounds of *réveille*, when Lonczynski was gathering his poor belongings together, and laughing inwardly at the contrast between the shabby and patched uniform and the rich, bulky epaulettes, the aide-de-camp rushed in and asked him to come to General Dombrowski.

Lonczynski followed him at once, replying hesitatingly to the salutes rendered to him.

In the house occupied by the staff, he was met by the Colonel and introduced into a room in which General Dombrowski and his son, both wounded in the late fight, were lying in two beds beside each other.

"Who is there?" asked a muffled voice.

"You gave orders, sir," said the Colonel, "to bring you Colonel Paul Lonczynski."

"Ah, give me your hand. Sit down on the bed. We were anxious about you. And the appointment came of itself? . . ."

"I do not know myself . . ." said Lonczynski timidly.

"You must have some one who seized an opportunity."

"Upon my word, sir, I cannot think."

Dombrowski sighed quietly.

I do not make any reproaches to you. Even if that were the case you would have acted wisely, for, as you know, they have not paid any attention to my reports."

Dombrowski became silent.

Lonczynski tightened his lips and sat motionless.

"You are going to the Emperor's staff," said the General, after a longish pause. "I congratulate you."

"There is no cause for congratulation, sir."

"Why not?"

"Because I beg of you to answer that I do not accept the appointment, and if my refusal is not granted I shall leave the army."

The General made a movement of uneasiness.

"What an idea!"

"Yes, sir," answered Lonczynski earnestly, "for I did not

make any steps to be promoted in this manner, and to advance before others more worthy than I am."

"Nonsense, nonsense!"

"I shall do as I said, sir."

"You shall not dare to. I should never forgive you, Lonczynski. The deuce, I do not know how to lie, therefore I say that in the first place I was surprised at such an appointment; but I do not envy you. On the contrary, I am glad, and now more than ever, for I see that you are more worthy to be a colonel than the others. If I could, I would have already given you those epaulettes. Give me your hand. I cannot move mine. Go to the general staff. The more like you are there, the better it will be for us. You will take the report about yesterday's fight. You have been sharing our hardships for years; you will know what to say to the Emperor. We will follow him, but he must take better care of us. Yes, yes; it is well that you should be on the general staff. We have had nobody there, and our best plans were crippled. The Emperor, as it seems, is in Liebstadt. That is all. I cannot speak any longer."

The General breathed deeply, his head fell motionless on the pillows.

Lonczynski rose heavily.

"I wish you a quick recovery, sir," said he with a stifled voice.

"Thank you. Give me your hand. Good bye. By-the-by, Lonczynski, if I am not mistaken, you are a relation of the Walewskis."

"Of the Walewskis?" repeated with surprise Lonczynski. "Relation! No; my sister married a Walewski."

"Then she is a Walewska."

"Undoubtedly, sir," said Lonczynski drily, "if she is Walewski's wife."

"Is he not a chamberlain?"

"Yes."

"Then the Chamberlain Walewski's wife is your sister!" ended the General, with a peculiar smile.

Lonczynski was hurt by the expression of his face.

"May I ask you, sir, for the reason? . . ."

"I have none. Well, we were chatting with Gielgud about

you, and it came into my mind. . . . Good-bye, and be careful, for the roads are crowded with dangerous marauders. . . . ."

Lonczynski took leave of the General and Colonel, got from Pacosh the report for headquarters, and about an hour later mounted a big mare, which he purchased from a dragoon officer for five napoleons, and started off.

The journey was difficult, for the mare was old and exhausted, the short days did not allow him to make long rests, and armed bands of vagabonds did not permit of travelling by night. Moreover, in the halting-places the Colonel could hardly get a piece of bread for its weight of gold, or a handful of straw for his mount. In several places he was obliged to run away from robbers, who, although they wore French uniforms, did not pay any attention to his colonel's epaulettes, and hoped to find him a wealthy prey.

For this reason Lonczynski took off his epaulettes by the time he reached Malborg, and put them with the other things he carried on the saddle.

When, on the third day, he perceived Liebstadt in the distance, he breathed freely and sighed. Gloomy thoughts left him; curiosity about his new duties, about headquarters, that foundry of the thunderbolts of war, took hold of his imagination.

In Liebstadt he was, however, disappointed, for instead of headquarters he found only a battalion of infantry. Lonczynski reported to the commandant of the battalion, and from him he learned that the Emperor had gone to Ostrod. The Colonel wanted to go further at once, but the Frenchman detained him almost by force, entertained him in the most hospitable way, and only when the Colonel and his mount had eaten and rested, did he consent to his departure.

Lonczynski was puzzled at the cause of the Frenchman's hospitality; he understood it only at the moment of taking leave, when the commandant of the battalion begged him to do him the favour of asking at the general staff for him to be transferred to Marshal Davoust's army corps.

The dusk was already falling when Lonczynski left Liebstadt, but he did not wish to stay there overnight, for his road to Ostrod was straight, the horse was rested and fed, and the distance was only about twenty miles. Then the proximity of

headquarters promised that the road would be devoid of robbers, for the field gendarmes were patrolling as far as Elblong.

In Morong the Colonel stopped to get a guide and set out for Saalfeld.

The guide—a big, broad-shouldered peasant, with a sheepskin on his head—looked to the Colonel suspicious; but there was no choice, and he could not travel alone, for the snow had begun to cover the black, beaten road.

The innkeeper in Morong told him that the man was ready to conduct him to Saalfeld for half a thaler. The Colonel agreed, and as he was accustomed to all kinds of dangers he did not bother his head much, and started.

The guide rushed forward so quickly that the mare was obliged to follow at a good pace.

For about an hour the Colonel followed the guide in silence, admiring the man, who would not stop even for one moment, who passed through the snow-drifts, and would not allow the mare to reach him. Finally he seemed to be tired, for he stopped suddenly, leaned on his staff, and wiped the perspiration from his forehead. The Colonel neared him.

The guide pushed his sheepskin over his eyes and muttered—

"For such a trouble half a thaler is not too much."

"We shall see; you may have one thaler if you bring me where I want to go."

"And perhaps ten."

"How now?"

"No matter," muttered the man, and went forward.

The Colonel pressed his mare, not wishing to stop the conversation.

"Where do you come from?"

"From Jansbok."

"A Pole?"

The man shrugged his shoulders and did not answer.

"How far is it from Morong to Saalfeld?"

"Frenchmen shall not reach it."

"You do not like the Frenchmen?"

The peasant gnashed his teeth.

"The plague may take them!"

"Did they trouble you so much?"

"They crowded my house, they have eaten everything, they killed my hens, pigs, and cows, they have burnt my hedges. I am a beggar now."

"War!"

"So we say also," muttered the man, and laughed savagely.

"When once the war is over the good old times will return."

"If they do not devour us."

"Was it more easy for you under the Prussians?"

"It was not easy, but at least they did not rob us. Are you going to those d—— Frenchmen? Eh?"

The Colonel, hearing that question pronounced with a kind of threatening barking, looked at the broad-shouldered peasant and answered evasively—

"Do you not see that I am your countryman?"

"It may be . . . although I thought so. Then why do you go where those Frenchmen are swarming?"

"Sometimes one must."

"It's not my business; only you will give me a thaler, for the road is difficult."

"I shall not bargain."

The guide stopped, looked round the white plain, and said after a thought: "From the willow we go to the right."

"But the road to Saalfeld is straight.

The peasant laughed.

"Yes; only we have not gone the way you wanted."

"Have you lost your way?"

"No; but they told me at the inn that you were a Frenchman, and I wanted to bring you to Hans across the lake."

"What Hans?"

"Well, we lead every Frenchman there. He has a big cellar. A blow on the head, and then . . ."

The Colonel shivered.

"So you commit murder?"

"No; they murder themselves. And what can we do with them? We get ten thalers for every Frenchman. We can get back something."

"But if they discover you they will hang you."

"They hang without that. They hang anybody they like; they do not ask one word. The day before yesterday a French

general was coming from Bransberg. He said he had a letter from our king to Napoleon Bonaparte. He was a Frenchman, although he spoke human language. But he does not any more."

"What have you done with him?"

"Nothing. Hans took him, and he gave me his bag. Not much in it. Hardly a thaler. But the bag was full of papers. Hans read them and could not make them out—French writing. I shall show them in Saalfeld to the secretary; they may be of some use."

"Have you them with you?"

The man rapped his sheepskin coat.

"Yes; and perhaps you could make them out, for the secretary is a cheat."

Then the peasant swore at the Frenchmen and threatened them.

The Colonel did not listen to his effusions—he was thinking how he should get the papers from the man, for they must have been important if they were sent by a special officer. At any rate, the papers of the French general staff should not fall into the Prussians' hands. On any other occasion the Colonel would not have hesitated to shoot down such a man; but here he was entirely at his mercy, for without him he could not possibly find his way. Common sense advised him to wait for an opportunity.

It is true that he could kill the man and get the papers, but he had some scruples about doing this. The man was a robber, a foe worse than the Prussians, but he was blinded and pushed to despair by his own misery. The churl felt only that they robbed him and made a beggar of him.

The Colonel had seen with his own eyes the devastation made by the French army, and he understood the peasant's hatred.

In the meanwhile, the consciousness of duty, the consciousness that he had before him a man who perhaps possessed very important papers; a man who, without any scruples, had given up a French courier to death, troubled him.

Had that man had a weapon and known how to defend himself, then the Colonel would not have hesitated to risk his own life; but to shoot at an unarmed man, especially after having taken advantage of his credulity, seemed to him a villainy unworthy of his rank.

While the Colonel was trying to find some means by which he could get hold of the papers, the peasant stopped suddenly and pointed towards the distance. The Colonel looked in that direction, when at the same moment the report of a rifle, followed by several others, was heard.

"They are fighting."

The man waited awhile, and when the firing was not repeated he smiled ironically, and said: "They are firing to scare the people. We must turn to the right. You had better dismount, for it is safer."

"I shall only do that when it is necessary."

"As you wish; but you must give me my thaler now, for I do not know whether I shall get it afterwards."

The Colonel threw the money to the peasant.

"Now we must hasten to reach that wood. Take care of the horse, for it is marshy here."

And the guide began to walk so quickly that the horse, stumbling on the frozen ground, could hardly keep pace with him.

When they reached the wood the peasant listened for a while, and then went forward, pushing aside the brushwood to make way for the horse.

Suddenly, a few steps in front of them, the shadow of a man appeared. The peasant stopped the horse by the bridle, and said in a whisper—

"Down, and follow me."

But before the Colonel could follow the advice he heard behind him: "*Qui vive!*"

"*Les amis!*" answered the Colonel.

"*Nous allons voir! Ne bougez pas!*" and twelve men surrounded him.

"Where from?" asked one of the men imperatively.

"Colonel of the Staff of his Majesty."

"What?"

"I have said it. Conduct me to the commandant of the detachment. Is it the field artillery?"

"Yes. But you must excuse us. It is dark; we must escort you."

"That is what I want."

"Pray dismount."

The Colonel did as was asked, and stood beside the peasant.

They started at once. The peasant was gloomy. The Colonel took pity on him.

"Why are you so sad?"

"They will hang me."

"Do not be afraid; only say that you are in my service."

"Yes; but if they find on me those papers . . ."

"Give them to me—quick!"

The peasant hesitated, for he thought that his companion was putting a rope round his neck, but at last took out the papers from under the sheepskin coat and slipped them into the Colonel's hand.

After an hour of fatiguing marching they reached Saalfeld, where, after some inquiries, which had rather the character of military honours rendered to the Colonel, he was called to General Hervé, who was in command of the third army corps.

Hervé received him enthusiastically, showered compliments upon him, and invited him to lunch. The Colonel wanted to excuse himself, giving as a reason that he had a shabby and patched uniform, but the General would not hear of such an excuse, and the Colonel was obliged to stay.

"I will introduce you to my aides-de-camp; they will take good care of you."

The General went to the side door, but stopped suddenly, and said: "Colonel, are you not Madame Walewska's brother?"

"It is true that my sister married a Walewski, but I do not know which Madame Walewska you mean."

The General was embarrassed.

"I am sure I had the honour to be introduced to your sister in Warsaw! I was dazzled! I do not know a more beautiful, a more charming, and a more elegant person than Madame Walewska!"

The Colonel could hardly help smiling at the General's enthusiasm.

"I am glad to hear that; but there must be some mistake. My sister does not go into society. A certain difference of age between her and her husband . . ."

Hervé laughed good-heartedly.

"Then it is the same. Mary, wife of a very . . . of the former Chamberlain, not very young. . . . I was, and I am still, bewitched! Should you have an opportunity, pray remember me to her."

"I should be very glad, only now . . ."

"Naturally, naturally! I understand!" said the General shrewdly. "At any rate, pray remember my request. We lunch at twelve o'clock."

Hervé then conducted the Colonel to the other room, occupied by the aides-de-camp of the staff, introduced them, and commended him to their hospitality.

The Colonel found himself in the midst of elegant officers, and he felt that he was in another world unknown to him. Therefore, when Captain Romeuf asked him if he would not like to rest in his quarters, the Colonel accepted his proposition at once.

Romeuf occupied elegantly furnished rooms in the next house, which testified that the Captain had not ceased to be a refined Parisian.

"I wonder if you will find everything you want," said Romeuf to his guest. "I will send our Jacques to you at once—he is not at all a bad *coiffeur*."

"Thank you! May I trouble you to send me my servant with my things, and also to give me a pass for him, as I wish to send him back."

Romeuf at once did as he was asked, and withdrew.

The Colonel looked at the gloomy peasant, and said cheerfully: "Well, you see they have not eaten us up!"

"Not yet!"

"And they shall not! I am sure you would like to go as soon as possible."

"Would they let me?"

"Yes. Here is your pass. You can go at once. And here is another thaler. . . ."

The peasant grew red.

"May God reward you!" answered the man, and sneaked out of the room.

The Colonel began to dress himself. He brushed his shabby

uniform carefully, pinned on the cross of the Legion, made the hilt of his sword shine, and then, having looked at himself in the mirror, he smiled with satisfaction.

Then he proceeded to pack his shabby belongings, for he did not wish the Captain to see his ragged linen. While doing this he noticed the papers he had got from the peasant. He unfolded them and began to read, thinking that the best way would be to hand them to General Hervé, telling him that he had found them. The papers were signed by General Bertrand, and all were addressed to the Imperial bureau. The Colonel's attention was especially attracted by a report dated from Klayped, which was then the headquarters of the Prussian king, Frederick Wilhelm; and in that report he found that the Prussian king had received Napoleon's propositions to make peace, on condition that his possessions up to the River Elbe should be restored to him, very coolly, and that even Napoleon's intimation that he did not think much of the Polish provinces, since becoming acquainted with them, had not made the expected impression.

The Colonel's head whirled at such a discovery. Those words contained the kernel of Napoleon's diplomacy, the irony of life and the world, scattering the fantastic dreams for which thousands of Poles had let themselves be killed, the whole falsehood of diplomatic notes, proclamations, half-words, and even promises.

The Colonel was a soldier who believed in Napoleon—he was a soldier of hope. That hope sometimes only gleamed faintly, but it was always within him—and now it began to die out.

The entrance of Romeuf interrupted his gloomy thoughts.

"Do I disturb you?"

"Not at all," said the Colonel, folding the papers and putting them into a side pocket under his uniform.

"It is time for lunch."

CHAPTER XIV

IT was already dusk when the Colonel, convoyed by a span of General Hervé's stallions, came to the inn in Ostrod. Tired and cold, he welcomed the brightly lighted hostelry, promising himself a good rest in a warm room. He was, however, terribly disappointed. The inn was so packed with officers of all ranks and regiments that the Colonel at once lost hopes of finding even a corner to lie down in. Wishing, however, to inquire where he could spend the night, he pushed his way through the group of officers sitting on the floor to a corner, in which a ragged innkeeper was sitting.

"Listen. I want a room!"

"I wanted one myself."

"I will pay well."

"I would do the same."

"What the deuce! Have you not at least a bunch of straw?"

"I have nothing! They have taken everything! They do what they please!"

"Give me some whisky!"

"I have none!"

"Then sell me some bread."

"I have not got it."

"Is there another inn?"

"Every house is an inn, but everywhere you will find the same thing as here."

The Colonel set his teeth and looked round. Only now he could see what was going on. The room was crammed with French uniforms. Uproar, shouts, laughter, swearing, threats filled the room, Without any consideration for rank, for prayers and threats, those who were stronger occupied

chairs, tables, benches, and the floor, and did not think of giving way.

There was no other alternative for the Colonel but to take his valise and go elsewhere, and in the last instance to spend the night in General Hervé's carriage or to report himself to the general staff. The Colonel left the inn and went to the town.

Ostrod was crowded; all the houses were lighted up; all were smoking in order to lessen the steely embraces of the frost and to warm the victors of Ilawa.

The Colonel began at first to look for an inn, but having convinced himself that all were as crowded as the first one, he wanted to find a room in a private house, but all in vain. The guards occupied every corner; the hospitals were in barns; the stables were taken by generals; the officers took possession of hen-houses.

Having lost all hope of finding even a corner to lie down in, the Colonel decided to pass the night in his carriage; but to his amazement, the carriage was not where he left it, and the marauders lying in the street near the inn informed him that the coachman, being afraid that his horses would be eaten, had left as soon as he could.

His position was more than unpleasant. It was impossible to remain out-of-doors, because of the intense cold.

Suddenly a thought flashed through his brain. He had a report to the Emperor; therefore he had a right to go at once to the Imperial general staff, where he would be able at least to sit on a chair and wait till morning.

He determined to carry out his idea at once, and having turned again towards the town, he met a detachment of field gendarmes, of whom he inquired where the quarters of the staff were. The officer pointed out to him a one-storied house.

"Here," said he drily.

The Colonel boldly entered a dimly lighted house.

"Who? To whom?" asked a voice from the other end.

"Colonel of the Imperial staff with a report."

"To the left; you will find an aide-de-camp on duty."

The Colonel, following the indication, found himself in a large room, in which several officers of different ranks were sitting at the tables.

The bright light of several candelabra and warmth coming from a fireplace gave him a thrill of delight.

The Colonel mumbled the usual greetings, and, attracted by the warmth, went to the fireplace, but at the same time there resounded from a table a sharp question: "Who? What for?"

The Colonel raised his head proudly.

"I have a report from Tchew."

"Ah! Pray show it to me."

"But you are not the chief of the staff."

"I must know all the same what you bring."

"I bring a report addressed to his Majesty. Here it is."

The officer sitting near the fireplace rose, took the envelope, glanced at it, and said drily: "It is not for us."

"But this is the staff . . ."

"Of Marshal Berthier," finished the officer. "It is not for us."

"Where shall I go, then?"

"Two steps from here. But the report is not urgent."

"It contains details about the fight at Tchew."

"We know them already through Marshal Lefébvre."

The Colonel was abashed. The officer finished the conversation in a more friendly manner.

"You have plenty of time till to-morrow. The best way will be to report to the commandant of the Emperor's headquarters, and he will tell you to whom you are to go."

"Certainly. . . . But that being the case, will you not be kind enough to tell me where I could spend the night?"

"I?"

"I am a colonel of the general staff."

"I see it, and I wonder that you have forgotten about the quartermaster."

"But where can I find him?"

"That is none of my concern. . . . Excuse me . . . I am very busy. . . ."

The Colonel, notwithstanding the officer's bow of dismissal, did not stir. The officer grew impatient.

"You are not reasonable at all. I understand that it is not agreeable to search for quarters at night, but what can I do?"

"I do not ask you to help me, only to permit me to stay here till morning."

"Here? It is out of the question."

"I shall stay here, all the same."

The officer exchanged a significant look with his comrades.

"I consider it impossible."

"And I look at it as a disagreeable but unavoidable necessity."

"Colonel, you are not going to violate the rules?"

"Nor to freeze out of doors."

"I shall be obliged to report you."

"As you like. I remain. What, the devil! I was summoned to the Imperial staff, not to sleep in the street with vagabonds."

"But why do you not go to the quartermaster?"

"I shall see him to-morrow."

The officer rose and looked at the Colonel threateningly.

"Colonel, I have the honour to ask you to leave this room."

"I am sorry, but I shall not."

"You expose yourself to the worst consequences."

"Very well."

The officer seized a sheet of paper.

"I am writing to the commandant of the guard-house."

"That is your business."

"In a quarter of an hour you will be deprived of your sword and conducted to the guard-house."

"If only there is a fire there."

The officer seized the pen.

"Your name, sir?"

"Paul Lonczynski."

The officer grew crimson.

"I beg your pardon, sir."

"Lonczynski," repeated the Colonel.

"Madame Walewska's brother?" exclaimed the officer, rising from his chair hurriedly.

"That has nothing to do with the matter," answered the Colonel sourly, troubled again by the last question.

"You came from the North Legion, from General Dombrowski's army corps. Yes; Colonel Lonczynski, Madame Walewska's brother."

The Colonel frowned.

"What then?"

The officer buttoned himself up and rushed from behind the

table. "Colonel, permit me to have the honour. I am Flahaut, the Prince of Berg's aide-de-camp. I am very glad, and very sorry, too, that you did not tell me your name at once, for we were expecting you."

"Expecting me?"

"Certainly. Your quarters have been ready for two days. Truly, I do not know how to excuse myself. Will you permit me to introduce my comrades to you—Messieurs Remusat and Delaunay. Can I offer you the hospitality of my rooms? I am sure you will not refuse. Here to the left are my modest quarters. Ah! papers! Nothing urgent!"

The Colonel, surprised by such an ending to the quarrel, did not refuse, and was soon sitting before a sumptuously served table.

"Pray excuse my camp meal."

"But it is a banquet."

"We do what we can. Do you prefer Bordeaux or Burgundy?"

"Anything."

"Ah, Colonel! How could you expose your servant to such a confusion?"

"I did not know . . ."

"An hour ago we were talking about you with M. de Ségur. You understand, the Emperor's *maréchal de logis*."

"You were speaking of me?"

"Yes. You were expected yesterday. This morning the Emperor asked about you."

The Colonel became confused.

"The Emperor . . . about me! . . . You must take me for someone else."

"Certainly not. Is it not you who, by some mischance, have been waiting years for your appointment as captain?"

"Yes, it is I."

"One more proof that I have good information."

The Colonel did not know what to say.

The wine, abundantly poured out by Flahaut, and still more, the news about the Emperor's inquiring after him, upset him, together with the sudden transition from complete isolation to a sumptuous and hearty reception.

In the meanwhile, Flahaut continued to entertain him with conversation

"Ostrod is unbearable. Much more so that we come here from Warsaw. What a lovely town! And women! Every one of us has left our heart in Warsaw. Naturally, Madame Walewska was the queen. Beautiful woman!"

The Colonel laughed good-humouredly.

"Dear Warsaw! If I had not been born in Paris, I should like to have been born in Warsaw."

Flahaut continued to be enthusiastic, and finally tired himself and the Colonel.

"Then you say I have quarters?" delicately hinted Lonczynski.

Flahaut rushed from his chair.

"I am at your service. I have sent you an orderly. Pray be so kind. . . . Your valise shall be sent."

"Is it far?"

"Almost opposite the Emperor's quarters. You are the Prince of Bassano's neighbour."

"The Prince of Bassano's!"

"Yes; M. Maret! De Ségur will be sorry that he is not present at your installation. In his name I beg to ask you to excuse it, should you find anything not corresponding with your requirements."

"But how have I deserved all this?"

"It is our duty, nothing more. Pray, this way."

Flahaut went forward.

Soon the Colonel found himself in a luxuriously furnished apartment, heated, lighted, and provided with everything.

"I wonder if you will be comfortable here?"

"For years I have not had such quarters."

"During the war we must reduce our requirements. Here you have your sitting-room, here is your bedroom, here is the room for your orderly, and here is the orderly himself."

The Colonel perceived the stalwart figure of a soldier in the uniform of *chasseurs à cheval.*

"What is your name?"

"Jacob, sir."

"And now permit me to wish you good night. I shall advise M. de Ségur at once. Perhaps you will be summoned to-morrow to the Emperor."

"But, Captain, I have not a decent uniform."

Flahaut became thoughtful.

"In that case it must be made at once."

"But who will make it?"

"Leave that to me, provided you do not go to bed at once."

The Colonel, entirely hypnotised by the Captain, nodded affirmatively.

Flahaut was so quick, that in about fifteen minutes he returned with three tailors, who, without losing one minute, took measurements for the new uniform, cut out the cloth, and tried it on as soon as the pieces were put together.

Flahaut considered it his duty to entertain the amazed Colonel.

After about an hour of work, the head tailor tried on the new uniform once more, and, bowing respectfully, said, "At six o'clock the dress uniform will be ready, at eight o'clock the overcoat, in the afternoon the undress uniform."

Not waiting for an answer, the tailors left the room.

Flahaut rose also.

"It will be my duty to call on you to-morrow. By-the-by, a little indiscretion; will you permit me to settle with the tailors? and when you . . ."

The Colonel shook the Captain by the hand heartily.

"No; thank you very much. I have money. But, dear Captain, tell me to what I may attribute all your kindness? Be frank, and do tell me."

Flahaut became embarrassed.

"Nothing more than simple duty, respect, and, if you would not think I am too daring, then I would add also my personal sympathy for you."

Flahaut took leave. The Colonel dismissed the orderly and lay on the sofa in order to collect his thoughts. But it was a difficult task. What had happened to him during the last two or three hours had upset the order of his ideas. He could not doubt now that he had become a man of importance, and not because of his charge and of the Legion of Honour, but by himself, simply because he was a Lonczynski.

The Emperor had inquired about him. To-morrow he would be at the Emperor's. M. de Ségur would pay him a visit. And then? Then . . . perhaps he would get a regiment—perhaps a whole brigade?

They might say what they would, but the Emperor had remembered him. He had asked about him. Perhaps he had heard of him at Hohenlinden, and recollected only now! O Lord! How could he show his gratitude? Would he have a chance to die for him? If he had charge of a regiment, if there was some difficult position to be taken, he would go first against the bayonets and die under the flag floating on the redoubt!

Let the cry of victory be his last cry, and the Emperor's name the last word of that cry!

Such were Lonczynski's dreams.

The tailors brought the new uniform at the stated hour, and when the Colonel put it on and looked at himself in the mirror he blushed—so elegant he appeared to himself. That grey-blue cloth was becoming to his silky brown moustaches, to his face that had become swarthy in the field. Silver braid and embroidery, white trousers, top boots, a three-cornered hat with a cockade, and a sword completed the uniform.

He was still looking at himself when Captain Flahaut rushed in announcing M. de Ségur, and insisting that immediately after the audience with the Emperor he should call on Marshal Berthier; otherwise the latter would feel offended.

The Colonel could not help laughing.

"Captain, be frank with me!"

"I consider it my duty."

"Then why should the Marshal care about me?"

Flahaut cleared his throat.

"Well, sir, you are already a man of importance, and perhaps you will soon be of still greater importance. Ah, I think this is M. de Ségur."

The Colonel went to meet the new-comer, who, with all his courtier's amiability, paid several compliments to the Colonel, mentioned Pani Walewska, and told Lonczynski semi-officially to come to the Emperor's ante-chamber.

"But should I be there? Perhaps his Majesty . . ."

"He has been told of your arrival. Then you must present General Dombrowski's report."

After having said that, M. de Ségur took leave of the Colonel.

Lonczynski was so moved by the news that in about an

hour's time he would be in the presence of Napoleon, that he did not try to conceal his fears from M. Flahaut, who indulgently encouraged the Colonel.

"You will see there is nothing extraordinary in all this, especially for you, because you are certain to be received very graciously."

"But how shall I talk?"

"As with me, adding Sire. Then you must answer boldly, without hesitation."

The Captain's words made Lonczynski more courageous, although not for long, for when he found himself in the Emperor's waiting-room, packed with most splendid uniforms, when he heard the aide-de-camp calling generals and marshals, when he saw the different expression of the faces of those who had passed the door to the Emperor's study, and with what burning cheeks they returned from the audience, his fright returned. Besides, either on account of Flahaut's popularity, or simply because of the kindness difficult for him to understand, the Colonel made acquaintance with some one at every moment; every moment some one was shaking hands with him and covering him with compliments, or asking him to be permitted to become his friend. Moreover, he several times heard the name of his married sister pronounced in a whisper, and then he noticed that they looked at him inquisitively. Of course, it must have been sheer curiosity aroused by his sudden advancement, but the Colonel would have given anything—and he did not know why—if they had not pronounced the name of his dear Mary.

"Monsieur le Colonel Paul de Lonczynski!" read the Emperor's aide-de-camp from the list.

The Colonel grew pale, adjusted his sword mechanically, and went to the door. Those standing in his way retreated respectfully. The aide-de-camp opened the door and whispered—

"To the right."

The Colonel found himself in a small room, beyond which to the left was the Emperor's study.

Lonczynski made a few steps and stopped as riveted. Through the open door he perceived the Emperor sitting at his writing-desk.

Napoleon raised his head slightly.

"Come nearer."

The Colonel came to the desk and drew himself up like a cord.

"You are Lonczynski?"

"Yes, Sire."

The Emperor rose, walked to and fro, and said as if speaking to himself—"Lonczynski! Very well, very well!"

Then he stopped suddenly, and asked—

"What have you to say?"

"I have the honour to thank your Majesty most humbly . . ."

Napoleon made a gesture of impatience, and interrupted him: "You come from Dombrowski's army corps?"

"I have a report."

"Then why do you not give it?"

The Colonel, abashed by that remark, could hardly pull the paper from under his uniform, and handed it to the Emperor with trembling hands.

Napoleon unfolded the papers and read them quickly.

"They are short of provisions and ammunition. He thinks that I have them. He is wounded."

"Yes, Sire."

The Emperor glanced sharply at the Colonel as if wishing to tell him that he did not ask for a reply.

"But he is brave. The only man amongst you all. Understand? He and Wybicki. They should have been born Frenchmen. Ah! he writes about you also. Excellent! That is what I wished. You are a brave man. I am very glad: you have distinguished yourself at the right time."

"I should like to do better."

"What? Ah! very well. I am satisfied with you. You shall remain with me."

Napoleon stopped suddenly—put his hand under his uniform, and became thoughtful.

The Colonel stood, not knowing whether the audience was finished or not.

After a moment of silence the Emperor turned, and as if recollecting the Colonel, asked abruptly: "Ah, Lonczynski! And what more have you to tell me?"

The Colonel reddened, searching in vain for a proper answer.

The Emperor walked again across the room, took a pinch of snuff, and said: "Cold! The country is poor, eh?"

"Because of the war, Sire."

"No; because of disorder, laziness, incapability. You think otherwise?"

Lonczynski was confused.

"Speak! Why do you not speak?"

"Your Majesty," began the Colonel, but before he could finish General Dorsenne rushed into the room.

The Emperor, at the sight of the General's excitement, frowned and asked through his set teeth—

"What is the reason of this?"

"Sire, the Guards refuse to obey."

"What?"

"Yes, Sire, mutiny! They refuse to execute the command."

The Emperor laughed drily.

"Dorsenne, you are a madman!"

The General said in despair—

"I would rather become a madman, than come here with such news."

"Speak, then!"

"They were dissatisfied after the battle at Ilava. We did our best. This morning they asked for bread."

Dorsenne breathed deeply and lowered his voice: "I informed all the officers; we reported to Marshal Berthier—he came at once. He spoke. We all besought them, we threatened them—all in vain. They will not give up their demands."

"What demands?"

"They demand either to return to France . . . or . . ."

"Or what?"

"Or bread."

"What have you said to that?"

Dorsenne shrugged his shoulders.

"Sire, we cannot get any bread."

"Why did you not tell me that before?"

"Your Majesty, we wanted to hide their refractoriness from you; we wished to save the honour of your Guards, Sire."

Dorsenne became silent. For a moment only the General's

heavy breathing was heard in the room. The Colonel stood as if riveted, unable to grasp the horror of this bad news.

"Dorsenne, you can go!" said Napoleon suddenly, in a voice that betrayed no emotion.

The General looked at the Emperor with surprised eyes.

"I am going there at once," added Bonaparte.

Dorsenne sounded his spurs while saluting awkwardly, and went out blindly obedient.

The Emperor looked for a while towards the door by which the General had gone out, then he glanced at a table on which were lying a sword, three-cornered hat and gloves, and said quietly to the Colonel: "Give me my sword!"

The Colonel obeyed the command.

"Hat! Gloves!" ordered Napoleon.

The Emperor girded on the sword, pressed on the hat, and began to put on the gloves.

The Colonel followed the Emperor's every movement. Gloomy thoughts swarmed in his head and tore his heart, and horrible presentiments made him shiver.

There is a mutiny! Unbridled madness that broke the chains of discipline, and dared to disobey a Marshal! And here . . . he . . . the Emperor, was going there amongst the demoralised soldiers!

Napoleon buttoned his gloves and went with firm steps towards the door. The blood rushed to the Colonel's head, his legs gave way. . . .

"Your Majesty!" cried he with trembling voice.

The Emperor turned round astonished.

Lonczynski knelt.

"Sire, you cannot go there! There is mutiny! Do not go, Sire!"

Napoleon put his hand on the Colonel's shoulder.

"Yes, you have the same beautiful kind eyes. I shall not forget your words. Rise! You wish me to be afraid of my boys? No! Rise! Come with me! Come!"

The Emperor went swiftly into the ante-room; the Colonel followed him.

Napoleon said a word to the Mameluke, who rushed out and made a sign to the ostlers.

The horses were brought. The Mameluke gave the Emperor his grey overcoat.

Napoleon mounted.

The Colonel jumped on the back of the first horse. Several officers rushed to the others.

The Emperor did not look at his aide-de-camp, spurred his horse, and galloped towards the suburb of Ostrod, where a frightful mutiny was seething. Those who two weeks earlier, during a snowstorm, advanced blindly against cannons, those who had spent years in wars, who did not understand how they could live without war, to whom a bullet was a comrade, a carbine a dear friend, they refused to obey!

Former soldiers of Hoch, Kleber, Joubert, former comrades of Lefébvre, Bernadotte, Lannes, Davoust and Ney; artillerymen who remembered the thin Capitain of Toulon, infantrymen who had as many stripes as Bonaparte had taken steps to the throne —men of iron, harder than rocks, madmen, whose whole pride was a cross, whose whole happiness the Emperor's smile, whose only desire was to fight and to die for him—the forefront of the army, the wall of Napoleon's eagles, glory of France, cradle of heroes, nursery of Bonaparte's marshals, dukes, princes, and kings; blind men, for whom the only sun was Napoleon; a crowd hardened by climbing the Alps, by fighting in the sands of the Sahara—such men refused obedience.

In the suburb of Ostrod, where the extensive camp was situated, a human ant-hill was seething; there the Guards were discussing in disorderly groups; the calls of officers were answered by threatening growls; there Berthier was received with hisses.

Nothing could be done; enthusiastic speeches about Lodi, Abukir, Austerlitz and Arcoli were vain. The mad feeling of wrong, the longing for their country, the lack of enthusiasm for further warfare, and finally, misery—had broken discipline.

"Enough of war! We want to go to France! To France!" shouted the Guards.

"Soldiers, will you then return without laurels?" admonished a young officer.

"We prefer to find them in the soup," answered an old corporal boldly.

"Very good! Laurels in soup! Conduct us to France!" shouted *les chasseurs à cheval.*

"We will go by ourselves," growled *les grenadiers à pied.*

"We shall ride," corrected *les grenadiers à cheval.*

"Or let them give us bread!" shouted a dragoon.

"Bread! Bread!" thundered the Guards.

"We have sent for it!" explained an officer of *les chasseurs à pied.*

"Shut up, you well-fed doll! Get out!"

The officer withdrew precipitately.

"We are going home, and that's all about it."

"*Vive la France! Vive le pain!*"

The flame of mutiny increased every minute. The regiments mixed with one another, and above the crowd of soldiers rose the martial faces of those who were more sure of themselves.

"Let Vraincourt speak!" shouted the grenadiers. "Listen to Vraincourt!"

"Black Michael will give us advice. Where is Black Michael?" cried the dragoons.

The demoralised ranks were looking for leaders. The officers went away, for they understood that words were useless, and only bloody cannonading would bring order.

At any moment the Guards might pass from protest and threatening to deeds, when all at once the crowds moved nervously.

"The Little Corporal is coming," said numerous voices.

"Let him come—we shall tell him also!"

"Enough bluffing!"

"He would like to go to the moon!"

"Short legs!"

"Like that windmill's wings!"

"He will speak to us about ambitions."

"Old story! Let him give us bread!"

"Hold up, boys!"

"He will not bite—fiddlesticks!"

"Wonder what he will say!"

"We will shout louder than he!"

"Why? Let him talk for the last time!"

"Here he is!"

The Emperor rushed at full gallop among the mutinous soldiers, followed only by Lonczynski.

The Guards became silent at once.

Bonaparte reined in his horse, looked round, and said loudly: "What are you doing here, you smutty-nosed boys?"

The soldiers looked at each other. The Emperor's words surpassed their expectations, confused them, struck them dumb.

"Bread!" cried someone.

"Bread, papa, bread!" thundered the soldiers.

Bonaparte laughed, looked serenely at the mutinous soldiers, and slightly whipped his horse.

"*Du pain? Eh bien il n'y en pas!*" said the Emperor, and turned his horse towards the town.

Dead silence reigned supreme over the mutinous Guards. All at once six thousand hearts throbbed quicker; six thousand faces became brighter; six thousand bearskins, casques, and turbans rose over the heads of the demoralised soldiers; and six thousand voices shouted joyfully: *Vive l'Empereur! Vive le Petit Caporal!*"

"With him and for him! *Vive l'Empereur!* To the camp!"

Those shouts flew after Napoleon until he disappeared at the turn of the road.

The Guards returned slowly to the camp, chatting, joking, and saluting the officers they met.

On the place of the mutiny remained only two would-be leaders—Vraincourt, the grenadier, and Black Michael, the dragoon.

Vraincourt looked at Michael, and Michael at Vraincourt; then both sighed.

"What now?" mumbled Michael.

Vraincourt pushed his bearskin over his eyes.

"He spoke."

"The deuce!"

"Do not speak, because . . ."

"We were full of words."

"As if we could, without him!"

"We must go the Colonel."

"Let them shoot us!"

"They must!"

"Let us be going."

"What did he say?"

"Smutty-nosed boys."

"And we wanted to go to France—as if we could, without him!"

"We are blockheads!"

"Scoundrels!"

"Vraincourt!"

"What?"

"I think that for such scoundrelly behaviour it will not be enough to be shot."

"Certainly, we shall be hanged."

"Without trial."

"We must accuse ourselves honestly."

The mutiny was over.

The Emperor returned to his quarters, quiet, thoughtful, not paying any attention to the enthusiastic astonishment of his staff. Lonczynski followed the Emperor, staring at his grey overcoat, not seeing anything but him.

Reaching his quarters, Napoleon turned slightly and called the Colonel.

"I am very much pleased with you. I am doubly satisfied, for I have convinced myself that you are worthy of your appointment."

"Sire!"

"You will report yourself in the afternoon also!"

The Colonel had no time to thank him for that favour, for the Emperor entered the courtyard of his quarters, where, having dismounted quickly, he disappeared in the doorway.

The Colonel handed his horse, as did the other officers, to the ostlers, and was intending to return to his rooms, when he met Flahaut.

"I was just looking for you!"

"It was my duty, sir. Have you seen—what? And what do you think? He alone can manage them! Is it not true?"

"I have no words to express my astonishment."

"Every day we have something new here; not only the Guards, but we all. . . . I do not know if three men could be found who would not be paralysed by the Emperor's one

word. He is a sorcerer! What? Ah, the Prince de Bassano asked after you. Perhaps you would be kind enough to go into the Emperor's waiting-room."

"But I have not . . ."

"Precisely, because you have neither audience nor a report. You shall rest for a while. That is where we all assemble—a kind of club. And then it would be a pity for us all, if you would not deign to be with us, for as the hero of the day . . ."

"Captain, you are joking?"

"It is as I say. You shall convince yourself!"

Flahaut was right, for hardly had the Colonel passed the threshold of the Emperor's waiting-room than he was greeted by a long whisper of voices pronouncing his name, and this whisper was followed by hand-shakes and compliments.

The Colonel could hardly answer all those civilities; but attentive Flahaut, with all the freedom and self-assurance, helped him, assuming not only the rôle of a guide, but also emphasising his friendship, by which he overawed those present.

Amidst that torrent of sweet words disturbing the Colonel's thoughts, the vigilant Captain Flahaut rushed to him again.

"Colonel, the Prince of Bassano wishes to talk with you."

"The Prince of Bassano?"

"If you will be so kind—to the left.' And before Lonczynski could notice, his hand was grasped by that of powerful M. Maret.

"You are my neighbour," said the Prince simply. "To my great sorrow, however, I am leaving here, and I was afraid to lose the opportunity of making your acquaintance. Therefore, I ventured to trouble you."

"It is an honour to me!"

"Colonel, permit me to congratulate you. The Emperor spoke well of you a little while since. I am sure we shall see each other often—very often! I shall be very pleased if you permit me to be of any use to you."

"Your kindness . . ."

"You must not talk in that way to me. I am Wybicki's friend. I am sure you know him."

"I used to see him formerly in our legion, but we were divided by the abyss of inequality of rank."

"I understand, but such abysses disappear sometimes. . . . I am going to-day to Warsaw. Perhaps you have some errand? Letters?"

"I would not dare . . ."

Bassano smiled good-humouredly.

"The idea, my dear Colonel! it is our duty to be useful to one another. You will do me a true favour by giving me some errand. And you must not despise the opportunity, for it is far, and communication is difficult."

"If I knew I should not be abusing . . ."

"Well, come, my dear Colonel! Anything you want . . ."

"Well, then, I have a sister, who must be in Warsaw. I should like to send her a letter."

"You have two sisters," corrected Bassano.

"Yes, but I wish to write to the elder one, the one who is married."

"To Madame Walewska?"

"You know her?"

"My dear Colonel, how could I help knowing her? Would it be possible?"

"If I might dare to ask you to take a letter . . ."

Bassano looked surprised at the Colonel.

"You wish to send a letter to Madame Walewska to Warsaw?"

"Yes; but should it be inconvenient to you . . ."

"Not at all! Only, do you think that Madame Walewska is in Warsaw?"

"Undoubtedly!"

"H'm! such being the case—with pleasure! At any rate, you may be sure that the letter will reach her. In an hour I will send my servant to you."

Lonczynski thanked the Prince heartily, and having taken leave of M. Flahaut, returned to his quarters, in order not to lose an opportunity of sharing with his dear Mary the news about his unexpected appointment, about his stay in Ostrod, about the conversation with Napoleon, and about the whole revolution that had happened in the poor life of the lieutenant.

Hardly was the letter finished and handed to the Prince of Bassano's servant than Captain Flahaut came to remind him that he must pay a visit to Marshal Berthier.

It was impossible to avoid the honour of visiting the Vice-Constable, as well as of making some other solemn calls.

Lonczynski did as was suggested by the Captain, and when at last he was going with him to his rooms, he thanked him heartily for the trouble and fatigue caused to him.

Flahaut interrupted the thanks by a modest remark: "It is not worth while to speak about such a trifle."

"I do not agree with you, and I consider myself your debtor."

"Then you can make things square with one word."

"I shall be very pleased indeed."

"If you could obtain for me to be transferred to the general staff and leave to Paris."

Lonczynski was surprised.

"Excuse me, Captain, but I do not understand."

"It is a long story. I am tired of being aide-de-camp to the Prince of Berg. I do not know whether you know him. . . ."

"Not at all."

"He is very queer. He is fantastic, conceited; in one word, service with him is not very agreeable. I have endured it for a long time, but cannot any longer, and as my family affairs call me to Paris, I should like to combine a transfer with my leave."

"Captain, I understand, but what can I do? How can I do anything?"

"Is this little favour too great a trouble?" said Flahaut, offended.

Lonczynski burst out into hearty laughter.

"Captain, excuse me—I take that for a joke! I should like with all my whole heart—but what do I amount to? I have no influence to get that for you."

"You can do it very easily."

"How? Tell me, then."

"To-morrow, when you meet Marshal Berthier, during the conversation with him, say two words to him about me."

"Where shall I meet him?"

"In the Emperor's waiting-room. Berthier will first speak to you. He must!"

"Very well, then. I will tell him, but I do not guarantee success."

"I am sure of success, and I thank you for it in advance. I

am very grateful to you. Here are your quarters! I have the honour to wish you good-bye."

The Colonel became thoughtful. "Captain, may I ask you for a moment of conversation in my rooms?"

"I am at your service."

They entered the Colonel's quarters, and Lonczynski, having seated the Captain at the fireplace, said to him: "And now favour for favour."

"Always at your service!"

"You are a man of honour. Forget about the difference of my charge, and be my friend."

"Colonel, to-day . . ."

"And tell me frankly, to what exactly do I amount here?"

"To very much," said Flahaut precipitately.

"That means nothing to me. I will be frank. A few days since I was a lieutenant, who dreamed in vain of the epaulettes of a captain, for whom you were an authority. I have not done anything extraordinary. . . ."

"I protest most emphatically."

Lonczynski became gloomy.

"Captain, I asked you to be frank. If you say that the Italian Legion had no reason to be ashamed of me, I agree with you; but all that does not explain to me the mystery why you all consider me to be a man of importance; to what I may attribute such a distinction."

Flahaut could not conceal his embarrassment.

"Colonel, it is natural. The Emperor pleased to do that! The circumstances . . ."

"That does not explain to me . . ."

"Destiny, Colonel! The Emperor could not do otherwise. And then . . ."

"There are better and more worthy . . ."

"No, positively, no!"

Lonczynski pressed more and more. The Captain continued to give evasive answers. At last the Colonel became irritated.

"Captain, upon your honour! From your words I gather that you know something, and you must understand my curiosity, or being more precise my duty to be curious."

Flahaut frowned.

"Colonel, I respect not only your rank, but also the man in you. I know but very little. . . ."

"Then tell me . . . I must know the whole truth! Where did my promotion come from? I am sure there was some talk about it. I have convinced myself how well everyone here knows. If the Emperor wished to have some one on his staff, then why have I been chosen?"

"Ah! nothing strange in that. Simply some one, without your knowing of it, has rendered you the same service as I asked of you. It was sufficient to mention to the Emperor at the proper moment. And then . . ."

"What then?"

"The rest depended on you. This morning one might doubt if you would be able to keep on the surface. It is very difficult with the Emperor. You were lucky enough to win his favour at once. The audience decided. You are on the list of the Court, I have seen it with my own eyes. And the man who stands so near the Emperor is feared here."

The reasoning seemed logical to the Colonel.

"I agree on that point, but I do not know anybody who would have spoken in my favour."

"Well, in Warsaw the Emperor was very accessible."

"No, no! I cannot think of anybody. It is true that I have a brother-in-law, by name Walewski, but I never saw him in my life, and I have some reasons to think that, were he able, he would rather ask for my dismissal."

"H'm! And Madame Walewska?"

"My sister! You must know her but very little. She is the best soul, and very fond of me, but she would not dare. She is not capable of having such an idea!"

There was a puzzling smile on the Captain's face.

"But often women can do most. They all can!"

"You do not know her!" interrupted Lonczynski bitterly.

"An innocent conjecture, without any intention!"

The Colonel changed the subject of conversation. Flahaut remained a while longer, and then took leave, reminding Lonczynski about his protection with Berthier.

The Colonel having remained alone, called his orderly, told him to wake him after the first sound of the *réveille*, and retired.

After the day, full of such different impressions, Lonczynski desired rest; he did not want either to think of events, solve his doubts, or try to think what the next day would bring to him. He wanted to sleep, to forget, to find rest for his sorrowful head, to cool his burning imagination. But, notwithstanding all the efforts of his will to banish the thoughts that crowded on his brain, sleep did not come, the irritated brain was working with double activity.

The pictures seen returned to him, the words heard sounded in his ears, he fell into a vicious circle of the same reminiscences. Only towards morning he became quieter, he was even slumbering, when he suddenly woke up and remembered the papers taken from the peasant.

That remembrance made him get up, and aroused in him a storm of remorse; it crushed him and filled him with fright.

He, a Colonel of the Imperial Staff, an officer, whose duty was to embrace, as widely as possible, all the needs of the army, having acquired by chance documents of such importance, keeps them in his possession; does not care that perhaps the Emperor may be waiting for the news from Klayped, that perhaps Bertrand is counting the hours and minutes, and waiting for new orders. And he, a Colonel of the Staff, so honoured, who was made a person of importance, who ought to possess some military talents, some future merits, had forgotten a duty so simple that the lowest soldier would remember it. And he had such an opportunity! He was asked twice what had he to say.

Lonczynski, frightened by such a merciless deduction, began to dress hastily, not wishing to lose one minute more. But when he plunged his face into a basin of cold water, quite different thoughts came to his mind. The whole gloomy, awful contents of the documents in his possession rose before him and froze the blood in his veins.

In the half light of dawn the Colonel noticed the silver epaulettes on his carefully laid out uniform, and laughed drily to himself. Who was he? Of course, a scoundrel whom Bonaparte had purchased, and who was ready to sell him his soul; who was glad that Napoleon's favours were showered upon him.

A few days ago the reading of such documents would have made him call out with indignation; and to-day, he is like a dog who, having found a collar in the road, brings it to his master without any care that he may be obliged to wear it; a dog who is glad when he is patted or when he gets a bone as a reward.

Infamous, a hundred times! For what had he found in these documents?

Well, nothing more or less than that Napoleon was playing false with the Prussians, that he was exciting the Poles in order to frighten the Germans and get better conditions from them.

And that awful truth unveiling Bonaparte's plotting, was it not sufficient to tear from his uniform the epaulettes and any gratitude for favours?

Lonczynski felt a contempt for himself. He seemed to himself like a common villain. For, even a few moments ago, he was so upset, not by the contents of the documents, but by not having handed them to the Emperor.

He was simply intoxicated with his own rank, with flattery and adulation.

He had seemed to himself to be walking on the heights, and had not felt that none of the marauders of the Legions had yet fallen so low.

It was done; but now he would not bear it any longer. He had been told that the Polish commissary Batowski was in Ostrod, and that Count Stanislaus Potocki was here also; he would begin by them—would let them know.

He got the documents by an accident. It is not his duty to have any scruples about keeping them secret. Perhaps he will lose his epaulettes. No matter. He does not need them, for he is not going to hire himself.

Tormented by such sentiments Lonczynski finished dressing, put a cloak over his shoulders and rushed out.

The *réveille* was sounding in the guard-house. The small streets of Ostrod were still quiet—only here and there one could hear conversation between ostlers and orderlies.

The Colonel determined first of all to find the commissary Batowski; but nobody could tell him where he was, therefore he understood that he must wait until people got up. In order

to shorten his waiting he strolled about the streets, and did not notice that he had come to the square in which stood the house occupied by the Emperor. Attracted by a crowd of servants he stopped, and among a group of lackeys he noticed one who wore big moustachios, and who seemed to excite a great hilarity, for all round him laughed heartily.

Lonczynski did not know why he was attracted by the possessor of the moustachios. The lackeys laughed continually, evidently amused by the man. At that moment a uniform of the Imperial Commissary appeared in the side door, and the lackeys scattered silently.

The Colonel moved on also, but seeing a lackey coming in his direction, said to him in a tone of reproach—

"Are you not ashamed to tease the old man?"

The lackey at the sight of the hat of a colonel took off his cap.

"But he is very amusing, sir."

"Because he is old?"

"No, sir! He does not know one word of French, and he would talk!"

"Who is he?"

"They say he is a Pole, with a lady . . ."

The Colonel looked towards the moustachioed man, who was also coming in his direction. Lonczynski looked attentively at the man, for, strange to say, if it were not for his green uniform with gold buttons and braid and his three-cornered hat, he could swear that he was his father's former gamekeeper.

That impression became so strong that the Colonel, recollecting what the lackey said about the man's nationality, could not refrain from saying to him in Polish: "Well, old man, how did you come to the Court?"

The man, at the sound of Lonczynski's voice, stopped as if petrified, looked astonished, and before the Colonel could understand what was happening, fell at his feet: "Jesus of Nazareth! It's our young lord!"

"John!"

"The same! I did not think I should have lived to have such a joy! Jesus! Jesus!"

"I am so glad to see you, old man! I looked at you, and

could not believe my own eyes . . . you, wearing the Imperial livery. . . ."

John cleared his throat, rubbed his eyes, and said with emotion: "Such a joy! Such a joy! A little while ago I was thinking of you, my lord! The years passed in waiting, expecting and longing."

"I have not been lost, as you see. Well, come to my rooms, there opposite; I have been here since yesterday, and we did not know about each other."

The Colonel conducted him to his quarters, told him to sit down, and said: "I could hardly expect a more agreeable surprise. Look, John! What? We are both alive! What?"

"My lord! Permit me to rise; I am your lordship's servant."

"Sit down. You are a friend. And besides that, you wear the Imperial livery; then you are somebody by that. Well, well! I should never have thought of meeting you here, for I could not imagine it. How came you to be separated from our house in Kiernozia. Do not excuse yourself. I understand . . . all is changed there, and not for the better . . . I am not angry with you about that. . . ."

"But, my lord . . ."

"I know, I know! Good old times, although hard! But how the deuce did you come to the Imperial Court?"

"Well . . . they told me about a week since to dress like that, for otherwise it is difficult to pass. But I do not find either honour or pleasure in that."

"Wait a moment, for I do not understand. In whose service are you, then?"

John raised his bushy eyebrows at the Colonel, and said jovially: "My dear lord, who would take such an old thing as I am? I serve our lady, as God commanded!"

"Mary!" exclaimed Lonczynski joyfully.

"Yes, yes, always! How could she, poor thing, do without me? And then it is my right to be with my lady."

A warm wave of reminiscences rushed to the Colonel's head, but he dominated the emotion, and said: "But you swore to me that you would never leave my sister, and you are here. What are you doing at the Court?"

"And could I leave my lady alone?"

Lonczynski got up as quickly as he could.

"Where is she, then?"

"Where could she be? . . . Here!"

"Here! Mary! The Chamberlain's wife! Pani Walewska?" said the Colonel with increasing astonishment.

"Yes, my lord! Do you see those three windows on the first floor?"

"Those windows? But that is where the Emperor is!"

John shrugged his shoulders.

"What of that?"

Lonczynski thought that a madman was talking to him, but having glanced on the quiet, smiling, good-hearted face of the old servant, he said: "Do not talk nonsense, for you irritate me."

"Am I a liar?"

"Answer, then!" interrupted the Colonel sharply. "Where is my sister?"

"Here, in Ostrod."

"When did she come?"

"To-morrow will be two weeks."

"Where does she live?"

The old man pointed at a window looking on the street.

"There!"

The Colonel put his hat on.

"Take me to her?"

John moved his head.

"Not for an hour. It is breakfast-time now. Nobody can enter."

"Are you drunk?"

"No, my lord, but it is as I said. Yesterday morning their greatest General wanted, and he could not enter. I spoke to my lady, but she said it must be so."

"Then I shall see the Chamberlain," said the Colonel, not understanding the meaning of John's words.

"His lordship, the Chamberlain? But . . . but he is not here!"

"He is not here!" repeated Lonczynski mechanically.

"No, and as it seems, as he did not exist at all. Oh, a hard master! My lord is impatient. And if she knew! She speaks of you, sir, continually. But it will be soon, for the

Mamelukes are already there. A little while longer, and the Emperor will come out."

At this conclusion a kind of lightning rushed through the Colonel's head—he was thunderstruck. He covered his face with his hands as if he wished to look within him. Only now he understood everything: his appointment, compliments, flattery, bows, and a whole series of circumstances incomprehensible to him till now. A few words of his old servant opened to him the whole horror of the situation.

John at the sight of the Colonel's change of face, became sorrowful.

"My lord, may I ask you what is the matter with you? Have I said what I should not? I am old, and I do not understand everything."

The Colonel shook off his torpor, looked at the old man, and said through his set teeth—

"You must tell me the whole truth. How did she come here? Speak!"

John grew pale.

"My lord, God is my witness . . ."

The Colonel seized him by the shoulder and shook him.

"No useless words! Speak! Who is with her?"

"Two maids and I," muttered John.

"And she is there—she lives with him?"

"Yes."

"And her husband remained in Warsaw?"

"They are going to be divorced."

"So! She found that she could live a happier, gayer, and more magnificent life."

"To be sure!" muttered John. "At least, there is no one to scold her, to abuse her."

"Shut up! You will go with me to her at once!"

The old man trembled.

"Would it not be better to wait until the anger passes? . . ."

"It is none of your concern," grumbled the Colonel, and began to put on his cloak.

"Come!"

John breathed heavily, and went towards the house occupied by the Emperor.

The Colonel followed him, not paying any attention either to military salutes or to the officers greeting him.

Lonczynski did not see anything except the green uniform of the lackey and his grey hair. That uniform led him to her—to the infamous one—to the one who, until now, had been the dearest in the world to him, of whom he had thought constantly for years, to the one whom he had carried in his arms, for whose silvery laughter he was longing, whom he considered as the better half of his soul, and who was now covering him with such shame.

Lonczynski walked thinking. She, purer than the dew, more modest than a violet, crying with laughter and smiling through her tears, a child, a most tender-hearted little sister, she is here, in the whirlpool of the Emperor's headquarters, on the billows of a wild life. Her name pronounced by the lowest servant, her name repeated in the whisper of the Court intrigues, her name laughed at by soldiers sitting round fires. At the price of her name, he had the epaulettes of a colonel, a cross, and a bag of napoleons. He had become a man of importance. They had paid him. They had paid him, not for years spent in misery, not for wounds, not for days of hunger, not for having sacrificed himself, for all that would not be worth such magnificence. They paid him for Mary!

The Colonel was seized by a spasm of laughter.

"Only that for Mary? What a miserably paltry price!"

John stopped suddenly at the side door leading to the Emperor's quarters and drew back, seeing a commissary of the palace standing at the door.

The Colonel stopped involuntarily, and looked threateningly at the Court official.

"You will be so kind, sir, to pass by the other door to the reception room."

"Let me pass! I must see her!"

"I have no order. You must speak to M. de Ségur."

"I want to see Madame Walewska, not M. de Ségur."

The official became confused.

"You are mistaken . . . Madame Walewska . . ."

Lonczynski made a disdainful grimace.

"You wish to stop me from seeing my sister?"

"Ah, Colonel Lonczynski!" whispered the commissary, respectfully stepping aside.

The Colonel rushed upstairs, but was stopped by a chambermaid.

"Madame Walewska?" asked Lonczynski through set teeth.

"Here to the left, but Madame . . . just now . . ."

Lonczynski pushed aside the maid and rushed into the apartment, arousing at every moment exclamations of surprise among the chambermaids putting the rooms in order. The Colonel paid no attention to the protests, he was not abashed by the quiet of the boudoir, and went further to the Imperial apartment.

He turned to the door on the left. The door was half-closed, so that one could see what was going on in the next room.

Lonczynski looked, and stopped as though turned to stone, so much was he struck by the picture which he beheld.

A few steps from him, there, in the room, at the table magnificently set, sat Napoleon, and opposite him a lady. A beautiful lady, dressed in blue silk, smiling cunningly, chatting freely with Napoleon, filling the rôle of hostess without any embarrassment—a lady in every movement, in every joint of the pink fingers of her little hand—*une grande dame!*

They were talking.

The Emperor begged—and he did it so awkwardly, so bashfully, that the Colonel could not help smiling. Was it the same Napoleon, the conqueror who knew not resistance—thoughtful, abstracted from everything that was not powerful, not mad, not great? Then that face, which had frowned majestically, those steely looks, were able to have such a serene expression, they could contain so much tender embarrassment; and that voice could be not imperative?

"Do this for me—only once," insisted Bonaparte.

"You wish me to learn how to break my oath?" answered the lady.

"Child! But those presents did not come from me!"

"It is true, but were I simply Madame Walewska, the Persian ambassador would care nothing for me! And so those things were sent for you?"

"Consequently for you also!"

"No, no!"

"I do not wear shawls."

"But they belong to the Empress of the French."

"You wish to tease me to-day, although I beg—I beg so nicely of you! Then I cannot give you anything at all? I know what you will tell me. But it was understood between us that there is no Emperor here."

"Ah, it is true," answered Madame Walewksa sighing, and, having risen from the table, she went to the large open chest, and from a pile of fabrics she took a blue Persian shawl.

"I will keep this one."

"But it is the worst one."

The lady came to Napoleon and put her little finger on his mouth.

"There is no Emperor here—I command in this place."

Bonaparte kissed the fingers passionately.

"Always! Always! Only that colour is not becoming to you—you told me so yourself."

"But Jeannette Radziwil is fond of it."

"What shall I do with the rest? I was so glad that I should be able to please you."

"Let us be wise. It would not be right to neglect the Empress. She has not many bright moments in her life."

Bonaparte frowned.

"It is her fault."

"But you told me that you respect the Empress in her, and you cherish her as a friend."

"Yes, it is true! You are right! You are good-hearted, immensely so, and always disinterested."

"Ah, permit me! To-day I have a request . . ."

"Speak—hundreds—thousands of requests! What is it?"

"Ask an audience for me of the Emperor!"

Napoleon laughed heartily, and assuming a comical gravity, he said—

"It is granted this very moment."

Pani Walewska executed with an amusing exaggeration three curtseys.

"Sire!"

"Madame, I am pleased to see you."

"Your kindness, Sire."

"Pray, speak."

Pani Walewska passed from a ceremonious curtsey to a coquettishly frolicsome pose. She craned her neck, with one hand she gathered the folds of the long dressing-gown, with the other she touched her slightly blushing face.

"Here, Sire!"

Napoleon came near her with a beaming face.

"I beg of you to kiss here, quickly!"

The Emperor fulfilled the command. Pani Walewska assumed a pouting face.

"But I said here! Here in that beauty spot, and not there near the nose."

Bonaparte flushed with joy.

"Mine, a hundred times mine!" he whispered, with the emotion of happiness, covering her with kisses.

"Your Majesty, you caught my lace with your cross! Look, you have torn it! As a punishment you will spend the evening with me."

"Very well—everything you order—I cannot refuse you anything!"

Pani Walewska became serious.

"You have repeated that so many times, and you forget that it is not allowed to you to speak that way."

"You are mistaken. Every one of your desires is mine also. Mary, I swear to you—if I doubted yesterday, I believe to-day. Believe me, you will never regret the confidence you had in me."

"Can it be true then?"

Napoleon closed Pani Walewska's mouth with a kiss.

"Do not ask. Have faith!"

"I believe with my whole soul, for you are bound to be Napoleon."

"And it will come more easy to me, for only now I am certain that my blue-eyed star shines with full brightness."

Pani Walewska put her head on the Emperor's shoulder.

"The star shines always with the same light, but it cannot help it if sometimes the clouds cover it."

A light rap at the door interrupted the conversation.

Napoleon made a movement of impatience.

"My time is over."

"Only you must not be so long as yesterday."

"And who suffers more?"

"I shall be angry!"

The Emperor kissed Pani Walewska's hand and disappeared behind the curtain.

Lonczynski, who witnessed that scene, wiped his perspiration —he could hardly believe his eyes and ears.

Then that lady, with the looks of a princess, with the refinement of a marchioness, that half queen teasing Napoleon as a playmate, was his former little sister, his Mary? He must be mistaken; he must have lost his consciousness; his senses must be in disorder. She, in the Emperor's room in that luxury! No, it must be a nightmare! The Evil One had brought him here and was deceiving him. Mary could not speak like that, could not be so coquettish; she would be burnt with shame before she could say one such word. It is not she! Some *grande dame*, but not his Mary!

The Colonel sighed deeply and wanted to leave the place, but he could not. Something riveted him to the spot—something imprisoned him—something deprived him of the faculty of movement.

Lonczynski felt that he ought to leave the place at once, that he ought to run away, so far as to lose sight of his former sister, to forget even the memories of his youth, even that for which he was longing. He would have given half of his life if he could not have stood at the door, if he could be where there was neither any Emperor's quarters, nor staff, nor army, nor those dizzying war cries, nor the shouts of victory, nor Napoleonic eagles, nor Polish legions, where there would be such emptiness as there was in his breast, in his mind.

The Colonel pressed his head against the wall and stood motionless.

All at once sounded in his ears the words of a familiar song, which he had heard so often when he was a child, then as a youth, which accompanied the noise of spinning-wheels, which sounded during the harvests, during the hay-making, at sunrise and at sunset.

Lonczynski staggered as if he were drunk. In the meanwhile, the song resounded stronger and stronger—

"In the dusky grove a nightingale trills sadly,
Love makes him joyful and song sorrowful.
It is not the same with Kasia's love,
For her heart is weeping while her face is bright."

The singing stopped suddenly, the door opened, Pani Walewska beheld her brother standing before her.

Seeing him she became pale. They looked at each other as if wishing to guess what was in the other's mind.

Pani Walewska first shook off her stupefaction, her face became crimson, her lips opened. She stretched her arms to her brother and put them round his neck with an outburst of joy.

"Paul, Paul! You are here! How happy I am! Come here! Let me look at you! I was so longing, so longing for you! So many years! Only think! You have not forgotten your Mary! She is always yours, always the same."

Pani Walewska, having glanced at her brother's stony face, stopped suddenly, and after a moment continued: "There is something the matter with you! Perhaps you have been told something! Do not believe—believe nothing! Do not ask me anything. I will tell you everything. I will conceal nothing. Only do not reproach me. I know what you think. I never forgot that I should be obliged to render you an account, you alone—for I have nobody who could understand me. Sit down here—I will sit at your feet. Only, Paul, do not look like that at me. I shall lose my senses. I must drink some water, for it burns me, I cannot speak. Ah, I feel better now! At last you are with me. I see you. What a happiness! How cold your hands are. I understand. You doubt—you think that I am wicked. Yes, as they all do. Impossible! Although, naturally, you must think like the others. If you knew how they cringe! Before, I was nothing to them, and now I am their oracle. I have the best taste, the sweetest smile—I am the most intelligent. Everything is superlative. Stupid! As if your Mary could change! You must know everything first, and then you will judge and kiss me. Will you not? I was so longing for your kiss, for your embrace."

Pani Walewska began to cry.

Lonczynski sat motionless, looking with glassy eyes at his sister, and showing no sign that he understood what she said to him, that he heard her.

Pani Walewska wiped her tears, put her hands on her brother's knee, and with a trembling voice began to tell him about years spent with him, about her sorrows, disenchantments, longings, hopes, struggles, and dreams.

She spoke, smiling and crying, reaching with her thoughts the most remote boundaries of her memory, then again touching yesterday's events.

And when at last she told him all her story, when she unveiled to him her most secret thoughts, when she reached to the farthest corners of her heart, where she did not dare to look alone, when she felt that she had nothing further to say that could strengthen her justification, she covered her face with her hands, bent over her brother's knees, and became silent.

A moment of deadly silence followed, a moment of awful expectation for Pani Walewska.

Lonczynski was sitting motionless, gazing at his sister's head; his hands were cold and stiff.

Pani Walewska could not bear the silence any longer, she shook her head, pressed her hands on her brother's hands, and said with irritation: "Paul, I have told you all! Tell me, could I act differently? Fate pushed me to this. Destiny willed it to happen as it did. I had nobody who could advise me, who could help me. Do you hear—nobody!"

"Even no God!" muttered the Colonel.

Pani Walewska shivered, for in her brother's words she heard a merciless indictment. Her face quivered with pain, fear filled her heart.

"Paul, do not speak that way! You are the one person in this world who should understand me and should stand by me. If I am guilty, if you think that I should act differently, tell me, and I will do as you will order. Yes, provided you love your Mary, as you did formerly. Tell me, could I have acted differently? In the beginning I was troubled by some scruples, but now I have become familiar with the humiliation. It is true that that humiliation is one continual homage for every

one of my looks, for every one of my words, but that homage has something in it that you cannot understand. . . . Formerly my cheeks were burning, now I smile condescendingly to hirelings. Let them censure me, let them tear me, let them crawl—my life was not worth so high a price. Your Mary became a Judith, only instead of cutting off Holofernes' head, she has lost her own. I do not wish for anything for myself. He is very good to me. But sometimes I am afraid of him. I am afraid that she . . . Josephine . . . they say she loves him—others affirm she does not—perchance they do that on purpose. I am afraid also of Prince Eugène. But provided I reach my aim . . . What do you think? Paul, you have not yet said a word. Had I known you were coming I should have gone to meet you. I should have recognised you even in that uniform. Ah, I understand the army!"

Pani Walewska laughed nervously.

The Colonel made a movement, his eyes were full of fire.

Pani Walewska stopped laughing and began to talk quickly. "Yes, I do understand. In Warsaw people speak of nothing else. The uniform is becoming to you . . . those silver flowers—for they look like flowers—mean that you belong to the Imperial staff. You cannot imagine how glad I am. Could I have dreamed that I should see you wearing the uniform of a colonel? I am proud of you! He did not tell me that you were here. Perhaps he did not know it. You shall see how kindly he will receive you. You are going to lunch with us. You, your Mary, and the Emperor. Life is sometimes more beautiful than a fairy tale. Is it not? Ah, I did not notice, you have the great cross of the Legion! Great cross! You have distinguished yourself."

Lonczynski grew pale, pushed aside his sister brutally, and rose.

"Listen, you camp-follower! You shall return this plaything to your lover! Take it . . . the epaulettes also! You have earned them, you may wear them!"

The Colonel pulled off the cross and the epaulettes and threw them into his sister's face.

Pani Walewska clasped her hands together.

"Paul! . . . For God's sake!"

"You shall return them to him, and tell him to keep them for the brother of some other favourite, for you have no brother."

"O Lord!"

"Silence! Do not soil the name . . . you . . . harlot!"

Pani Walewska bent under the weight of the insult.

"You also against me! Then there is nobody in this world who will help me . . . who will understand . . . that I do not want anything for myself."

Lonczynski burst out into dry laughter.

"Ha! ha! Then you are so degraded that you have lost your common sense. You imagine that you will obtain from them the independence of our country. Ha! ha!"

The Colonel made a contemptuous grimace, while Pani Walewska spoke feverishly: "You do not know him! You do not understand how much he loves me!"

Lonczynski took out from under his uniform the roll of papers and threw them at her feet.

"Here is the answer! Here are documents which prove that I know him well. You have overestimated your beauty. Enough! You will give him all this, and you will tell him that you have no brother."

He put his three-cornered hat on quietly and turned to the door.

Pani Walewska rushed desperately after him, wishing to stop him.

Lonczynski looked at her contemptuously and pushed her aside.

"Away! . . ."

"But you will not go! You will not leave your little sister—your Mary!"

The Colonel breathed deeply, and said with an effort: "My sister . . . my Mary . . . is dead!"

Pani Walewska moved her pale lips, but could not say a word.

The Colonel went away.

CHAPTER XV

THE active M. Flahaut was very much surprised when, on going to the Colonel to remind him of his promise of speaking in his favour to Marshal Berthier, he found Lonczynski in his old uniform of a lieutenant of the Polish legions.

The polite officer of the general staff did not let him know of his surprise either at such a change or at the disorder in the rooms, and greeted Lonczynski with a salute that mingled the military and the modest.

"I hope my visit is not too early, sir?"

Lonczynski, who was sitting in a corner of the sofa, made an impatient movement.

"Who is there?"

M. Flahaut became confused.

"Pray, excuse me! Perhaps I importune you? But I bring the day's report, in which there is a mention of you, Colonel."

"I am not a Colonel!"

Flahaut tried to smile, but having glanced at Lonczynski's much changed face, made a grimace.

"To-day's report is very interesting," continued the Captain, wishing to get out of a difficult position, which he guessed but could not understand. "Very interesting indeed!"

"Ah, it is you, Flahaut!" interrupted the Colonel suddenly.

The Captain saluted, not knowing what to answer.

"Yes, yes!" muttered Lonczynski, "you are Flahaut. Well, I remember you asked me for protection, but you are too late. What a pity I am no longer a Colonel! But wait, I will give you some advice. Have you a sister?"

"No, I have not."

"That is unfortunate, for if you had, it would be very easy.

They would make you an officer of the Legion, and they would give you the epaulettes of a Colonel of the Staff."

Flahaut became crimson.

"Excuse me, how am I to understand your remark?"

Lonczynski made a gesture with his hand.

"You and all of you do not understand. Perhaps it seems to you as it seems to me. If you only had a Mariette! But wait. You already have a cross. Well, you are cunning enough for that. Naturally, you would not know. Excuse me, I am forgetting. It is only in our Polish legions that there are men who believe that in order to get such a plaything it is necessary at least to take a redoubt, or to cut half a regiment to pieces. But it is not so. Instead of such trouble . . . well, you know . . ."

Flahaut retreated towards the door. Lonczynski said to him in a friendly manner: "Captain, wait! You asked me for protection. You see that I remember well. You would like to leave Murat's staff. Nothing easier—provided you call a sister to you. She will be appointed a lady-in-waiting, and you will become a general. You do not like that! Ha! ha! I tell you it is the shortest way to distinction. . . . I am speaking from experience."

The Captain muttered something and left the room precipitately. Lonczynski called after M. Flahaut, but when he did not return the Colonel shrugged his shoulders and laughed to himself.

"Idiot, he does not believe it, although it is very simple."

The Colonel walked several times across the room, and then he called his orderly.

"Listen, what is your name? Ah! Jacob! my name is Paul."

"I understand, Colonel."

"You are stupid. I am not a Colonel. Understand, you will call me Paul."

The orderly drew himself up. Lonczynski frowned.

"Do not make any faces. If you do, see this fist? Give me some whisky."

"Yes, sir!"

"Quick!" shouted the Colonel. "Ah, you have it! Your health!"

"I do not dare!"

"Drink! but listen . . . perhaps you wish to remember me? . . . Eh?"

"Sir . . . Paul!" muttered the orderly, confused, "I do not dare!"

"You are a beast! What have you on your shoulder? An epaulette? Give it to me! Away with it! Yes! Drink! Mary is dead! Remember that! Why do you not drink?"

"I am drinking, sir . . ."

"Very well, then. Did you see that idiot Flahaut?—he did not want to believe me. What bad whisky! Have you given me water?"

"Whisky, as you ordered."

"Bring me some better."

"There is none, sir . . ."

"There must be! Go, bring it . . . march!"

The frightened orderly ran as quickly as he could.

The Colonel looked round carefully.

"He has gone. H'm! Bad whisky. He put some water into it, and I am so thirsty."

Lonczynski seized the bottle, lifted it to his mouth and drank its contents. Then he went to a table on which a pair of pistols were lying.

He was familiar with them. This one with the heavy barrel was the one he preferred; he knew that it jerked to the right. But now he would know how to fire. The thick-headed rogue did not expect such an honour. For the occasion he deserves to be treated well. Let him have twice as much powder as usual. If one has to fire, then why not fire well? Now some wadding and a bullet. It is a round one. More wadding—he is not hungry now! A fresh flint, and he is ready.

Having finished the loading of the pistol, Lonczynski laughed with satisfaction, looked with childish pleasure into the barrel, then he lifted up the weapon.

At that moment the door opened and spurs clinked. Lonczynski lowered the pistol and turned impatiently. About two steps from him stood an officer of *chasseurs à cheval* of the Guard. "Have I the honour of speaking to Colonel Lonczynski?" began the officer.

"I am not a Colonel."

"I have the honour to ask you to be kind enough to report at once to the officer on duty in the Emperor's ante-room."

Lonczynski became crimson. His eyes filled with blood.

"Who are you?"

"My name is Ornano, officer of the squadron on duty of the *chasseurs à cheval,* by order of the Commandant."

"I know no Commandant."

"I am ordered to bring you, Colonel."

"I said I am not a Colonel."

Ornano looked hesitatingly at Lonczynski, who added: "Go, and say that the Colonel will not come because . . . he is not . . ."

"Excuse me, but I was told that Colonel Lonczynski's quarters were here."

"These were his quarters yesterday!"

Ornano saluted.

"Such being the case, they gave me a wrong address."

"Certainly, you can see for yourself that in this uniform I do not look like a Colonel."

"To be sure, but could you tell me where I could find Colonel Lonczynski?"

"It is difficult to say. . . . For you understand, a man of such importance. You must know the Colonel's sister . . ."

Ornano paled. "I have heard something."

Lonczynski half closed his eyes, smiling cunningly.

"Well, you must agree that he advanced very rapidly. A week ago he was a lieutenant, and to-day they are all afraid of him. He received the grand cross of the Legion, he belongs to the Staff, he is on the Court list. He has sacrificed everything. But he has a sister! He?"

"Scoundrel!" muttered Ornano.

Lonczynski staggered.

"You are right! Ha, ha! you are right! But permit me, you too have the Legion! Is it also for . . .?"

"I was at Jena," answered Ornano proudly.

"At Jena? You took that trouble?"

"Sir, I do not know you, and I beg you to refrain from your remarks. Where can I find Lonczynski?"

"Ask Bonaparte, he will know."

"Do you forget to whom and about whom you are speaking?"

"I remember, and therefore I speak."

Ornano went out slamming the door.

He had not yet left the ante-room when he heard a report of a pistol behind him. He stopped and looked towards the door, through which he passed. Had that half madman fired? Who knows? Some odd fish! Let him fire. The Commandant of the guard-house must be informed.

Not paying any attention to the report of the pistol, Ornano became thoughtful; he did not know where to find Lonczynski. The order was urgent. He was commanded to bring the Colonel. At that moment a soldier entered the hall with a bottle under his arm, and he went towards the door of the apartment where Ornano had been vainly speaking with some madman.

"Hey! Do you live here?"

"Yes, sir; I am orderly of the Colonel of the Staff."

"Perhaps Lonczynski's?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very well; is your master at home?"

"Yes, sir."

"Conduct me to him."

The soldier went unhesitatingly to the door which the Captain had left a short time ago.

"But it is not here. I was told that he had not been here since yesterday."

"I am sure he is here, sir."

"Then conduct me," said the Captain impatiently; "go first!"

The orderly turned the handle, helped the Captain to take off his cloak, then, saluting, opened the second door.

Ornano looked at the other end of the room and retreated, moved by what he saw.

A few steps in front of him was lying in a pool of blood that odd man with whom he was talking a moment ago.

"What has happened? Who is he?"

"I do not know—I do not understand. Only a few minutes ago the Colonel ordered me . . ."

"Then he is a Colonel?"

"Undoubtedly, sir. I cannot understand. A wound in the forehead. He is still breathing. . . ."

Ornano stood as if pondering something, and not paying any attention to the efforts of the orderly who wished to lift up Lonczynski's body. Only when the clouds passed over Lonczynski's face he hastened to help the orderly.

The Colonel's face seemed to be one bloody wound.

Ornano, helped by the orderly, put Lonczynski on the bed and asked for water, which revealed a large flat wound on the Colonel's forehead.

Lonczynski gave no signs of life. There was no time to be lost. Ornano seized a piece of paper lying on the table, wrote on it a few words, and told the orderly to run with it to M. de Ségur; then he took from Lonczynski's valise a shirt, tore it into pieces, and having put them into water, applied them to the wound.

The wound bled much. Ornano did not stop, changed the water, and applied it constantly.

The orderly did not return.

Ornano was losing patience, but did not leave Lonczynski. It is true that the young officer had some wicked thoughts, which were that he did not care for the Colonel—that rather he should leave him, that he had done enough for Madame Walewska's brother by having sent the orderly for a surgeon—that it was none of his business to find the cause of such a desperate deed. But all the same, something forced him to remain, and to give the wounded man relief.

And this relief was already visible. The Colonel breathed deeper and deeper, his face became pink, the eyes opened slowly and grew brighter.

Ornano smiled bitterly to himself.

"I should give up the honour," he muttered to himself; "he will be wanting to be thankful to me. What a stupid story! And that numskull is not back. Just because of the loss of blood he may be wanting to begin his last will. *Sapristi!* He may ask me to give his blessing to that . . ."

He shrugged his shoulders.

The wounded man made a movement.

Ornano set his teeth and wanted to change the water, when he felt a light pressure of his hand.

"H'm! What?" asked Ornano. "You have made yourself bleed foully. What? To die? Upon my honour, you should not hasten. Walewska? Ah!"

Lonczynski made an effort, and whispered: "Not one word to her! Understand? To Walewska! To nobody. Nobody must know that I existed."

"Well, well! Plenty of time for that! I understand something about wounds. . . . One can take out the ball with one's fingers. . . . I understand."

"But you do not understand my shame!" moaned the Colonel, and fainted.

Ornano shivered. The veil of the truth was lifted up and uncovered the cause of the drama which he had witnessed. Remorse of conscience shook him. Yes, he was sneering at misfortune—he had accused that man of baseness. An hour ago, when he received the order to summon Madame Walewska's brother, he thought that he was going to see a boastful *parvenu*, who did not feel the mud with which he was bespattered; an hour ago he was obliged to call the sense of duty to his help, to enable him to carry out the order, to forget that he was going to the brother of that . . . to quench the fire that burned him. . . . For, ever since the day before, the whole of Ostrod was talking only of Lonczynski. People told each other, with biting remarks, that the newly appointed Colonel thought he was advanced so rapidly because of his military talents, and how quietly and impudently he asked the Prince of Bassano to take a letter to his sister at Warsaw! . . .

M. de Flahaut had defended Lonczynski, declaring that he was pretending to know nothing. Ornano was familiar with all the details, and he was free with his malicious remarks, for it seemed to him that he had a right to them, much more so, that they made the burden pressing his heart lighter, and he did not know that he was sneering at a pain greater than his own.

Loncsynski either knew the whole truth and was fighting with himself to save his honour from falling too low, or else, struck by the thunderbolt, he was unhesitatingly giving a proof . . worthy of an officer . . . of a man!

Ornano reasoned in this manner, continuing to apply cold water to Lonczynski's forehead. The latter, however, seemed to be half dead again.

Suddenly the officer was seized with a fear about the Colonel's life, although, on the other hand, he was inclined to think that he should let him die, that he had no right to force him to live.

The appearance of the surgeons with M. de Ségur interrupted Ornano's thoughts.

The surgeons proceeded at once to dress the wound and to extract the bullet.

M. de Ségur listened to Ornano's report sorrowfully.

"A very unpleasant accident," concluded the Emperor's *maréchal de logis*, and Master of the Ceremonies during the war.

"You did well to inform me of it! He must have turned the barrel imprudently, the cock fell down and fired!"

"I can assure you that nothing of the kind has happened! A few minutes ago the Colonel came to his senses and spoke."

"Ah! . . . he spoke! But he was unconscious. . . . I repeat that there was an accident. Nothing else. Let us hear what the surgeons would say. Ah, the bullet is taken out! . . ."

"It was on the surface," explained one of the surgeons.

"What do you think?"

"Nothing—he must be sent to the hospital. In two months he will be well. He pressed the barrel too much to his forehead; the lack of air made the shot weak. The only fear is that his brain may have been troubled. He will have a scar on the forehead. His skull is very strong. . . . He pressed the pistol so much that the barrel made an impression on the wound! He wanted to get rid of life quickly!"

"What?" interrupted M. de Ségur drily. "Then you would call an accident with a pistol a suicide?"

"Undoubtedly!"

"You are mistaken. Colonel Lonczynski could not do such a thing. If you look more carefully, you will come to that conclusion."

The surgeon looked attentively at M. de Ségur and bowed.

"Certainly, certainly!"

The *maréchal de logis* turned to Ornano.

"You have heard and you know now. Colonel Lonczynski

is a man of too great importance; such an action would give rise to conjectures. Pray remember it!"

Ornano understood the command.

"I shall conform myself to your indication."

"Yes, yes, you must. By-the-by, I have news for you. . . . His Majesty is very well disposed towards you. You have the Legion, you were promoted to be a captain, and now I am sure that you will be on the list for a subsidy."

"I am obliged. . . ."

"His Majesty speaks of you often, and calls you 'cousin.' I am sure you see how quickly you advance. Only a few weeks since you were a lieutenant. And how old are you?"

"Twenty-three."

"A fine career! Well, we have nothing to do here. They will take care of the Colonel. Poor man! And what carelessness!"

"As to carelessness, the Colonel's orderly is not yet convinced."

"Did he see?"

"As well as I did."

"No matter, I shall order him to be arrested at once; there is no other remedy for such churls. I am obliged to you for having reminded me of that. Should you need anything, pray call on me."

Ornano rubbed his forehead with uneasiness.

"I am ready at once to take advantage of your kindness."

"You will make me happy. . . ."

"Therefore I shall be obliged if my name does not appear on the list for the Imperial subsidy."

"What do you mean, Captain?"

"What I have is entirely sufficient for my needs," answered Ornano almost in a whisper. "As for silence, I have learnt that before to-day."

M. de Ségur tried to smile.

"Ah, yes, if you prefer. It is a little odd. People are right to call you whimsical."

"Precisely," muttered the Captain drily, "and I like to remain so."

. . . . . .

It was a quiet morning in April. After a cold March, which held the Polish rivers in its fetters, covered the plains of North-Western Prussia with snow and impeded the movement of the French army, the sun came out and began to melt the provinces of Moravia, Silesia, Lithuania, and Great Poland, which had been frozen until then.

The headquarters in Ostrod became full of animation and resounded with drums.

The Emperor ordered the headquarters to be removed to Finkenstein. The staff breathed more easily, the looks of the soldiers were brighter. The days spent in Ostrod had been very hard indeed; hunger and cold reached even the generals; merciless misery had been felt even by those who could conjure it with gold! There was plenty of gold in Ostrod, but there was no bread. From day to day not only the body, but also the spirit failed. Napoleon wished to rescue both. He would send messenger after messenger to Talleyrand to Warsaw, he would load the commissaries of the temporary Government with reproaches, imperatively demanding provisions. Bonaparte's cry was "bread and whisky," but notwithstanding Wybicki's efforts, notwithstanding that every granary was unsparingly ransacked, no more supplies could be got.

Bonaparte was the only person who did not lose heart. He willingly gave up the house he occupied in Ostrod and settled in a barn. The Emperor's example produced some effect, but not for long—cold conquered! And the worst of it was that Ostrod was diminishing, growing smaller and smaller, disappearing. The soldiers, demoralised by hardships, did not pay any attention to threats of court-martials, and destroyed hedges, even houses, in order to warm their frozen limbs. The field-gendarmes could not stop the disorder. Misery, climbing from grade to grade of the officers, had already reached Oudinot and even Berthier.

No wonder, then, that when the April sun appeared and the order was given to march, there was a mad outburst of joy in Ostrod. The preparations were pushed on with enthusiastic activity. The soldiers imagined that Finkenstein was a land flowing with milk and honey. It is true that in the meanwhile there were rumours that the war would begin soon, but

Napoleon's soldiers were not afraid of that provided they were not cold and hungry.

Captain Ornano, who was also pleased at the prospect of leaving Ostrod, after a talk with his comrades about it, became sorrowful, and having commanded his orderly to pack, he went to the other end of the town, where the military hospitals were situated. There he announced himself to the surgeon on duty, and was received with the respect due to an officer of the Guards, and what was more important, the Emperor's cousin. Ornano went straight to the object of his call.

"What will become of the sick men when the headquarters are removed?"

"We shall keep them here for some time."

"And then?"

"We shall send the convalescent to France, and leave those who are not able to support the journey in proper care."

"H'm! yes; but you must have some orders concerning the superior officers."

The surgeon winked at Ornano.

"I know about whom you are talking, and I can give you some news. . . . The Colonel, according to the last report of the head surgeon, is so well that he can get up in a few days. Yesterday Corvisart paid him a visit."

"I have heard of that."

"Then you must know, also, that the Colonel will be transported to Paris."

"To Paris! Does the Colonel know about it?"

"I do not think so—the order came this morning."

"H'm! the question is whether he will consent."

"Why not? The Colonel is surrounded by such care. He shall not be tired with the journey. Then he will have the special care of Dr. Larrey. You know that the Colonel is treated here like a marshal; we report about him every day to the Emperor."

"Could I see the Colonel?"

The surgeon became sorrowful.

"Have you permission from M. de Ségur?"

"I have not, but I think you will permit me to see him. I have been here already several times. . . ."

"Yes, but always secretly—always."

"I shall be grateful to you if you make no difficulties this time also. I only wanted to shake hands with the Colonel before marching out."

The surgeon decided quickly. A favour shown to such a man as Ornano was a good investment, for Ornano was already a man of importance, and he had every chance of becoming even a marshal.

"Well?" urged Ornano.

"I cannot refuse you, Captain, although I run a risk. If only nobody sees us. In case of necessity, pray name some other sick officers, as usual."

The surgeon sighed several times in order to emphasise the importance of the favour shown to the Captain, then went to the first floor, where, bowing, he indicated a door.

Ornano opened the door and found himself in a small room, which served for an ante-chamber to another larger room. The Captain threw his cloak and bearskin to the orderly, then opened the door and went quietly to the bed on which was lying a man with a bandaged head.

Hearing the steps, the sick man made a movement and asked in a subdued tone: "Is it you, Hieronym?"

"No; it is Ornano."

The sick man made an effort and sat up in the bed.

"Ah, it is you!"

"How are you to-day, Colonel?"

"Much better. Only do not call me Colonel. Simply lieutenant—ex-lieutenant."

"Do you know that we are going to leave Ostrod?"

The sick man made a movement of uneasiness, and overpowered the Captain with questions.

Ornano told him about the situation of the army.

When the Captain had finished the other laughed.

"It is strange! I could swear I knew all that."

"It happens sometimes. Now, you must decide. You cannot remain here."

"Naturally, for what . . ."

"I have heard they wish to propose to you to go to Paris."

"To Paris? You must be joking! What could I do there?"

"In your position . . . Should you not like to continue to serve in the army?"

"Never!" interrupted the sick man.

"In that case you may be certain there are people to whom your future is not indifferent."

"Captain, how shall I be able to show you my gratitude? . . ."

"Not to me. I am only a poor soldier! My only treasure are these epaulettes, which I won by hard work. I should like . . . But what can I do? There are more powerful people than I. . . . In Paris, you may have any post you care for. . . ."

The sick man looked attentively at Ornano, scrutinising his face with merciless attention. Ornano could not stand that look; he dropped his head and became silent.

There was a long silence, during which the Captain was considering in vain how he could continue the dropped conversation. Suddenly the sick man seized the Captain's hand and said: "And you think that I would choose? You think that I should be capable . . .?"

Ornano raised his head.

"No!"

The wounded man fell back on the pillows and breathed deeply.

"I thank you. You are what I thought you to be."

The Captain said timidly—

"You must decide something about yourself—you cannot remain here. You must express a wish. Where would you like to go?"

"Where I wanted to go . . . they did not let me go. . . . Well, now I shall return to my modest country home."

"Would you not prefer to return to your regiment?"

"What for? Would the regiment return to me what was taken from me? You do not understand! Emptiness! There is nothing in my heart! Once there was the war cry! I shall return to my fields, to quiet work, to God! Perhaps you do not believe in God! There is a God, and He punishes!"

"He forgives also!"

The eyes of the sick man grew large.

"Yes . . . God can!"

Ornano was silent; the wounded man fell into a stupor. After a while the Captain roused himself, and said—

"Will you permit me to repeat your wish where it should be repeated?"

The Colonel nodded affirmatively.

"It shall be as you wish," added the Captain. "And now permit me to take leave of you."

The Colonel responded by a warm pressure of the hand.

Ornano went towards the door.

"Captain!" called Lonczynski after him, as if he had recollected something.

"I am at your service!"

The sick man lowered his voice.

"Tell me why you . . . not knowing me . . . Did you do all this for me, by yourself . . . or . . . or . . .?"

"Upon the word of an officer, nobody knew about my visiting you."

"I believe you. You speak the truth, or you are silent. But excuse me, my poor head is so weak. . . . I do not remember anything. . . . But it seems to me that I have seen you once in my life. . . . But I cannot connect that moment with your kindness and sympathy. . . ."

"Permit me to be silent."

"Captain, otherwise I must believe . . ."

"Then I will tell you that, when I met you, I was in such despair that it seemed to me that nobody could be more unhappy than I. But when I saw you, my pain appeared to be very paltry. I noticed then that everything in you was so pure, so little egotistical, so proud, that I was frightened at my own weakness. I wanted to have a shining star, but I wanted it for myself! The fear that it shone for some one else persuaded me that I was not worthy to be called a star. But you, you wished to have its rays eternal. For you there was no Ego, there were no two roads, two morals, two honours! Where I destroyed, you wished to build; where I saw a conqueror, you were looking for a defender. I served because of ambition, you served because of self-sacrifice, and that consciousness attracted me to you."

Lonczynski, stunned by the torrent of ingenuous words, misty

to him, looked hesitatingly at the Captain, and rubbed his forehead.

Ornano smiled benevolently.

"Excuse that riddle. Perhaps you will learn more soon. Believe only one thing: that I came to you by my own will."

Ornano shook Lonczynski again by the hand and left the room.

In the ante-chamber the orderly handed him his coat. Ornano threw him a gold piece, and was going out of the door leading to the corridor, when it opened, and in the doorway appeared a carefully-veiled lady, followed by a frightened surgeon.

The lady shivered slightly at the sight of the Captain.

Ornano stood as if transfixed. Notwithstanding veils, he recognised Pani Walewska.

The Captain paled slightly, and drew aside.

The lady walked into the ante-room.

The surgeon bowed humbly, and hastened with an explanation.

"Your ladyship . . . the worthy patient wished to see the Captain. This door . . . straight . . ."

"Be so kind as to leave me."

"I am at your ladyship's service," mumbled the surgeon humbly, making signs to the orderly, and winking significantly at the Captain.

Ornano, who had recovered after the first impression, bowed coolly to the lady, and followed the surgeon.

The lady, however, said suddenly to him: "Would you be so kind as to remain a moment?"

Ornano bowed again and remained.

The lady made a sign to the surgeon to leave her, which he did, hurriedly closing the door.

The lady took off the veil. Ornano, at the sight of the face of the beautiful lady, grew crimson.

"Did you not recognise me?"

"At once."

"I thought so. Have you seen him?"

"Yes."

"I am grateful to you."

"I did not visit him for the sake of gratitude."

"You visited him . . . it is enough. Is it true that he is no longer delirious?"

"For the last week."

"For a week I have waited in vain for him to be feverish."

"Ah! you wanted . . ."

"I wished to see him, without being seen. I am going to-day. I must see him. I came alone . . . Captain?"

"Madame?"

"Will you refuse me a favour—would you not intercede . . .?"

"I?"

"Yes. I do not wish for anything. I do not wish to ask his forgiveness . . . I wish only to see him, to glance at him even from the threshold. . . ."

"He needs quiet so much. . . ."

Pani Walewska leaned on the chair. Her eyelids trembled, her bosom heaved.

Ornano was afraid of the shock to the sick man.

"Madame, pray remember that he may hear you, and it would arouse his slumbering grief."

"I will be quiet! I will not cry!"

"But you must go, you must not stay here."

"Then you refuse to help me? And I thought you alone . . ."

Ornano made a movement.

"I would like to take your word literally. I mean it!"

The Captain breathed. "I am going!"

Pani Walewska bent over the chair. Ornano went into Lonczynski's room.

Pani Walewska fell into a kind of stupor. Her face expressed timid uncertainty.

Ornano did not return for a long while. Twice Pani Walewska heard a muffled voice through the door, twice she trembled, till at last the door opened and the Captain came in.

Pani Walewska knew instinctively that Ornano stood before her, that he brought her a merciless answer. . . . She did not doubt for a minute what that answer would be—she was certain of it; but notwithstanding, she had not courage to listen to it.

Ornano was silent. Pani Walewska turned her head—the Captain dropped his eyes.

"I know," she whispered painfully—"I know what you bring me! I am unworthy even to look at him—to touch his hand. I have soiled the family name for my own pleasure! You are pure, you have great ideals, while I am an egotistical, greedy doll. . . ."

"Madame!"

"You wish to be so merciful, that you are ready to lie in order to pacify me. Do not trouble yourself uselessly. Repeat to me what he said to you. I must hear it!"

"But you have guessed it!"

"It is not enough! I wish to hear—I must hear it! Did you tell him what I told you?"

"Yes, I did."

"And he?"

"Refused."

"Perhaps you were not careful, and did not tell him the exact purpose of my visit?"

"I do not think so. I did what I could—I tried to persuade him. . . ."

"And in exchange he told you to bring me an insult?"

"No, he was quiet; he listened to the end, and then he told me that I was mistaken, for his sister . . . is dead. . . ."

Pani Walewska drew herself up proudly.

"Thank you, sir. Yes, she is dead, undoubtedly."

Ornano, hearing that unexpected conclusion, pronounced in a steely voice, was surprised, and could hardly believe his own ears.

In the meanwhile, Pani Walewska gathered the folds of her long dress and said: "Give me your arm!"

Ornano did as he was requested.

Pani Walewska turned towards the door, having previously veiled herself. In the corridor the surgeon wished to show her the way, but she dismissed him with a nod.

The Captain, feeling Pani Walewska's arm, dizzied by some intoxicating scent emanating from her, was undergoing fiery emotions. The moment when he first met her, all the hours during which he had lived for her, longings and unrealised dreams, rose before him and shook his heart.

The Captain conducted Pani Walewska with all the care of a fashionable man attentive to ladies; he even smiled, looked

quiet and attentive, but nevertheless he was struggling horribly within, in order not to utter an imprecation.

In the front of the hospital a carriage was waiting; the footman and the coachman wore green livery.

Pani Walewska stopped.

"I would prefer to return on foot if I knew it would not tire you."

"Pray, consider yourself rather—the distance is considerable."

"It is such a lovely day!"

"If you prefer . . .?"

"Yes, let the carriage return."

The footman saluted. Pani Walewska continued: "But I would prefer a side road, not through the town. I wish to breathe the fresh air."

"Then we will go by the field," said Ornano.

They turned to the right, and for some time both were silent.

Pani Walewska took off her veil and breathed the fresh air with delight. As for the Captain, having recovered a little from his first emotion, he tried to become entirely self-possessed, and for this purpose inwardly called Pani Walewska a cold-blooded comedian.

"How absent I am," she said suddenly, with quiet ease. "I had forgotten to congratulate you on your advancement. It is fine to be a captain at your age."

Ornano reddened. "I am twenty-three years of age," he answered with dignity. "I have served for seven years."

"But, if I am not mistaken, you were only a lieutenant at the ball."

"Then you still remember that ball . . .?"

Pani Walewska became confused, and she answered only after a little while: "It was so beautiful."

"Like a dream!"

"A very elaborate comparison. And you are already a captain."

"Then, you did not even recognise the uniform."

"Prince, you try to be malicious."

"You will excuse me, but I could not help it. But why do you call me Prince?"

"You were introduced to me by that title."

"I am obliged to Countess Potocka for it."

"Is that so? Then . . . I thought you were the Emperor's cousin?"

"I could prove that very easily, for my mother was born a Bonaparte."

"A great honour."

"Now, but not at the time, when she married a colonel of the Corsican Guards, Louis Ornano, a descendant of independent counts."

Pani Walewska smiled at that tirade. The Captain perceived his boastfulness, and became ashamed of it.

"Then your family comes from Corsica?"

"I was born in Ajaccio."

"Therefore, military service has a double charm for you. He will . . ."

"Who?" interrupted Ornano passionately.

"Naturally, the Emperor."

"He has already taken from me more than he can give me."

Pani Walewska turned to the Captain, and having met his fiery looks dropped her head.

"What ground is there for that idea?" she said, after a moment's thought. "Has the man who has taken what you would have liked to have, but which is not yours, robbed you of your possession?"

"You are right," answered the Captain gloomily. "One may learn from you how to be cool! Not everybody can weigh every word."

"Although you are an officer of a regiment who has so many duties at the Court. . . ."

"To-day I shall ask to be transferred to a regiment of the line."

"Your career will suffer by that."

"But my heart will gain."

Pani Walewska stopped.

"We have reached our destination."

Ornano looked round astonished, but noticing the Imperial standard floating over a large barn, said: "Yes . . . here are the headquarters. . . ."

"Permit me to thank you for your trouble," said Pani Walewska, with exaggerated friendliness. "I am very much obliged to you. I wish you success in your plans. I do not doubt that you will advance as quickly as you have done, and that when I meet you next time I shall be speaking to a general."

Pani Walewska smiled, and nodded good-bye.

Darkness covered the Captain's eyes. He did not hear her words, he did not understand anything but that she was going, that probably he would never see her again.

"Madame," he said passionately, "have you nothing to say to me—nothing whatever?"

Pani Walewska stopped; her eyes were veiled with sadness.

"Why should one speak if one knows that one would not be believed?"

"One might make truth convincing."

"Where there is no faith there is no truth. The consciousness of truth sets aside the need of believing."

"It seemed to me, however, that it would not be indifferent to you. . . . Excuse my presumption; it only seemed to me . . ."

"I am listening—speak!"

"It seemed to me, then, that I deserved, that . . . that it would not be indifferent to you what opinion . . . that telling certain details . . ."

"What would be the use of them to you?"

"Because I wanted to have you justified, because conviction . . ."

Pani Walewska tugged nervously at her veil.

"You are mistaken. Sometimes it may not be indifferent to us that some one believes in us, but as soon as proofs are asked for, that inclination passes. . . . Captain, Farewell!"

"Are you going to Finkenstein?"

"I do not know."

"At any rate, I wish you a pleasant journey."

"And I wish you as quick promotion as you have had."

"Only not so quick as this of to-day."

Pani Walewska laughed drily, nodded to the Captain and left him.

Ornano stood for a while following her with his looks, and

when she disappeared behind a house, he went slowly to his quarters.

Pani Walewska reached a small door in the gate, guarded by two grenadiers of the Guard. The sentry stepped aside respectfully, and Pani Walewska found herself in a large barn, converted into Imperial headquarters.

Here she hastened to a corner, covered with a large tent, in which for the past two weeks had been her bedroom, dressing-room, and drawing-room.

A chambermaid took off her fur coat. Pani Walewska sat on a bench covered with a rug. Her face was burning, her eyes were filled with tears.

The maid was going to and fro, and tried to distract her gloom by talking to her. Pani Walewska seemed to hear nothing. She looked into the dusky space and was silent.

All at once quick steps were heard near the tent. The maid withdrew towards the entrance, and said quickly: "The Emperor!"

Pani Walewska did not stir. Napoleon entered the tent, embraced its interior with a quick glance, went to her, and said with a mild reproach: "It is the second time I have come —I was uneasy. It is time, my dear child, to be ready for the journey. Your carriage is waiting for you."

"Very well!" whispered Pani Walewska.

"I am glad we are at last going to leave this horrid Ostrod! And I am sure you will not guess how we shall celebrate our leaving here. We are going to have chicken for lunch! A real chicken! Oudinot made us a present of it. But I see you do not enjoy the thought of such a feast."

Bonaparte touched Pani Walewska slightly on the shoulder, and said in a reproachful tone—

"You have been to see him?"

"I could not resist it!"

"And what for? I begged you not to go. He is a madman!"

"He is my brother."

"I think I have proved to you that I have not forgotten that for a minute. But he is not worthy of your attachment to him. He wilfully and inconsiderately trampled on the closest

ties, and you went to see him! What for? To tear your nerves, to irritate your unhealed wound, to humiliate yourself before one who is not worthy to touch the hem of your dress? You should respect yourself!"

"I went there, Sire, to convince myself that I have nobody in this world, nobody whatever!"

Napoleon took Pani Walewska by the hand.

"Mary, have you a right to talk so? And I?"

She looked sadly on Napoleon, as she said in a subdued tone: "It is true, Sire, you are still with me!"

Bonaparte made a movement of impatience.

"Ungrateful, spoiled child! Can you admit that I shall ever abandon you—you, my bliss, my good, my bright star? Do I not give you enough proofs of my attachment to you? Do you not see that you become dearer to me every hour?"

"If you only depended on yourself, Sire!"

Napoleon became thoughtful.

"You are right," he said after a while; "who knows what may happen! At any rate, you must remember that my love for you will last for ever, that I shall never abandon you, that you shall be the dear, the only one! But you must be the same for me as I am for you!"

Pani Walewska shook her head sadly.

"No, Sire, I shall remain what I am."

CHAPTER XVI

A QUIET July evening was falling on the shady gardens of Schoenbrunn, lulling the flowers to sleep, cooling the heated earth with dew and fresh breeze.

Schoenbrunn was retiring from the sad sound of trumpets and subdued beating of the drums; Schoenbrunn was retiring quickly, as if not wishing to lose one second of rest, as if wishing to make up for the nights of Essling and Wagram, during which the uproar of cannons chased away sleep.

The crescent of the moon came out from behind elm trees, silvering the roof of the residence of the Hapsburgs, and began his nightly wanderings through the alleys of the park.

Even for such a frequent visitor as was the moon, there were quite remarkable things to be seen in Schoenbrunn, because, from the standard flapping over the roof of the palace to the passwords of the night sentry, everything was changed. The white uniforms of the Austrian Imperial grenadiers had disappeared, Tyrolese songs were heard no more, the white wigs of the servants of the palace were no longer seen.

Schoenbrunn, that quiet refined Schoenbrunn, was filled with the clatter of arms, with a multitude of soldiers, with cries unfamiliar to the echoes of the park, conversations, signals, and songs. Soldiers unknown to Schoenbrunn were mounting guard, the palace swarmed with the martial faces of proud people who had been unimportant to Schoenbrunn; everything that spoke of the might and grandeur of the Hapsburgs was overborne by the people who came out from the fire lighted by the thundering cannons.

Everything was changed in Schoenbrunn—the inhabitants of the palace, as well as those in the pavilions occupied by servants, the horses in the stables, the carriages in the coach-

houses, the cooks in the kitchens, and the soldiers in the barracks; only the tall trees rustled as before, only in the green thicket the statue of a satyr was showing his teeth in a malicious smile, dead on his stony mouth.

Everything was changed in Schoenbrunn; from Schoenbrunn the Hapsburgs were no longer ruling Austria. In Schoenbrunn Napoleon was staying, and he ruled that country.

At the edge of the park of Schoenbrunn, on a spot remote from the Vienna Road, stood a small, one-storied house wrapped in creepers, nestling among shrubs and trees. In front of the house a groom, in rich green livery, was holding three saddled horses. On the veranda stood a middle-aged man wearing a half military and half court uniform, and looking at the horses he rapped constantly at his snuff-box.

Suddenly the door of the house opened briskly, and there appeared the green uniform of a colonel of *chasseurs à cheval.* The elderly gentleman turned at once to the new-comer, who said: "Corvisart!"

"Sire?"

"We are going back."

"I am ready, Sire!"

The groom brought the horses nearer. The Emperor mounted. Corvisart did the same.

At that moment resounded through the half-opened windows of the house the sounds of a spinet, followed by sonorous, silvery singing.

Napoleon reined in his horse.

In the meanwhile, the song resounded amidst the quiet of the park, waking up its echo, complaining and rejoicing by turns.

The smple words seemed to come from the depths of the heart and to reach beyond worlds, till having embraced the whole scale of sentiment, they changed into a war cry.

"Vous me quittez pour aller à la gloire!
Mon triste cœur suivra partout vos pas;
Allez, volez au temple de memoire,
Allez, volez, mais ne m'oubliez pas!"

The song stopped. Napoleon was still there as if waiting for more.

"Mme. Walewska sings charmingly."

"Yes; it is my favourite song. She alone knows how to put so much feeling into it," said the Emperor, not answering Corvisart's remark directly.

"*Ne m'oubliez pas!*" resounded a subdued voice through the half-opened window.

Bonaparte bent from his saddle towards the window, and said with feeling: "*Jamais, jamais!*"

The horses moved on and disappeared at the turn of the shady path.

Bonaparte rode ahead, followed closely by Corvisart. The groom kept at a respectful distance. The Emperor was silent; the physician did not dare to disturb his thoughts. Only when they reached a broad road, Napoleon turned a little towards Corvisart, who understood that movement and rode nearer.

"Have you examined her?"

"Yes, Sire. We had just finished our conversation when your Majesty came!"

"And what?"

"There is no doubt. Mme. Walewska expects . . ."

"Are you certain of it?"

"Positive—then Mme. Walewska . . ."

"Yes, yes, the best and noblest. . . . I did not myself doubt even for one moment—but you understand—I was diffident in spite of myself. Josephine deceived me so many times."

"Here I can guarantee, Sire!"

"Very well, then. Your assurance was necessary, for it is a very important matter. You understand, my own child! France must have an heir, for she cannot trust her fate to a bullet, which may find me during a battle. France must have a dynasty. The whole world must know that after Napoleon the First, there will follow the second, the third, the fourth—that the death of the first will not diminish French power, that the State built by me will last, will remain!"

"Sire!" whispered Corvisart hesitatingly, unable to guess the meaning of the words.

"Josephine must be put aside!"

"The Empress?" said the physician, frightened.

"Yes, she must be put aside for one who will be able to give me a son."

"But the attachment of Her Majesty . . . ?"

"If I could be permitted to look for affection, then I would look for it where we are coming from."

"Then Pani Walewska, in spite of herself, influenced the determination. . . ."

"You speak as if you would like to reproach me. . . ."

"I would not dare, Sire!"

"I know very well, by myself, that she will be very unhappy. . . ."

Then, after a while of silence, the Emperor said: "At any rate, not a word to any one yet."

"I understand, Sire!"

There was silence in the house left by the Emperor; the noise of the horses' hoofs was not heard any longer. On the veranda of the house appeared a woman dressed in white; she looked at the depths of the paths between the trees, sighed, and sat on a bench.

It was a charming July evening.

The woman sitting on the bench did not remain long alone; the door opened again, and in the meanwhile a subdued voice said: "*Chère Marie,* you are alone. . . . Has he gone?"

"Yes."

"Why did you not tell me?" said a lady reproachfully, who came on the veranda. "I wanted to speak to him about the Lubienskis. It would be difficult to have another opportunity."

"I do not think so," quietly answered the woman in white.

"Perhaps he was not in a good humour. What did he say?"

"You know, Princess, that we never talk about politics."

"And it is too bad. You wilfully renounce all influence."

The woman in white made an impatient movement. The lady prevented her answering.

"Do not feel hurt, my dearest, it is for you and not for me. . . . You have a position, and you must keep it."

"I do enough, but I shall not allow myself to be mixed up with intrigues. The Emperor knows the people that surround him well, he does not need my advice."

"But, *ma chéric,* there is no question of intrigues, but of your way of living. You ought to get rid of certain ideas of yours, you ought to give up that convent-like existence. People

should see you, should feel your power. You have convinced yourself about it. Do you remember in Paris when you were afraid of Josephine! You imagined that she would be furious with you, but it was quite otherwise. . . . Three times Josephine wished to call on you, and you refused to see her. What an idea! It worries me."

"I explained to you several times why I did not wish to see the Empress."

"Prejudices are good in our country houses, but not in the *grand monde!* I flatter myself that it is not the first Court that I have been at. You may not mix in politics, but you should be with him, he should see you, and then others would respect you."

"Princess, our opinions differ very much?"

"Unfortunately! You are too confident in yourself. If you listen to me! *Enfin,* how was he to-day?"

"I do not know myself . . . different from usual. Thoughtful, absent-minded."

"Do not say so!"

"Yes, it puzzles me. I have not for a long time seen him as he was to-day."

"Perhaps Eléonore again?"

"I do not think so."

"Ah, *ma chérie!* You do not know people—yes, you do not know, and I would swear . . ."

"Napoleon gave me his word. . . ."

"His word? Does a man give his word to a woman for the purpose of keeping it afterwards?"

"You have a peculiar gift of irritating."

"Marie, would I dare? Do you not see that a most sincere friendship is guiding every one of my steps. You blame me because I wish to be vigilant!"

"I do not see any danger."

"H'm! who knows? Only pray do not irritate yourself; but in your position one should expect anything, one must be prepared for the worst. . . . But you do not wish to understand that. . . . Suppose there is a change in his disposition—suppose you should be obliged to give him up, what will you do then? . . . You cannot count on Anastazy. . . . You will be welcome

to me, but shall I be able to keep you in your position, which has its requirements. Do not deny it, *ma chère.* It has great requirements. A Walewska can withdraw, but she must remember who she is?"

The Chamberlain's wife smiled bitterly.

"I understand my position too well."

The Princess sighed.

"You refute all arguments. You do all in your power to lessen even that influence which came to you of itself. Instead of catching the threads you break them wilfully. I had a letter to-day from Malachowski; there they know no more than we do here."

"What does he write?"

"Naturally, about the treaty. The news had come already from Vienna to Warsaw, that the provinces taken from Austria will not be joined to the principality of Warsaw."

"It is false!"

"You said the same before Tylza," said the Princess Jablonowska drily.

"Then the Emperor could not."

"Let us suppose it was as you say, but now a concession in favour of Austria is still more strange."

"How shall I understand this?"

"*Ah, chérie!* I do not know myself. You take everything so seriously. But you should know that I am the last to hurt your feelings. And then perhaps it is only gossip, although one is obliged to take it into account. But perhaps it would be better if you do not know anything about it. My dearest, let me kiss you. . . . Do you feel cold? Let us go in, the dampness may be dangerous to you."

Pani Walewska listened patiently to this speech, varied by several kisses deposited on her shapely head, and when the Princess finished her preface by putting a handkerchief to her eyes, the Chamberlain's wife said: "I daresay you understand that now I must insist upon your telling me everything—you must share your apprehensions with me."

"But is it worth while? They say . . .! And what do they not say? It is a trifle, and you cannot imagine how painful it is to me to repeat such things."

An ironical smile appeared in Pani Walewska's face.

"If it is really such a trifle?"

There was fright in the Princess's small eyes.

"H'm! I cannot say that. . . . On the contrary, to a certain degree one should count with it. It is apparently a trifle. Only, my dearest, do not take it too earnestly. Every cloud on your forehead is painful to me. Yes, *chérie*, very painful!"

Here Princess Jablonowska seated herself on the bench near Pani Walewska, and, assuming a melancholy expression, began to arrange the folds of her silk frock.

Pani Walewska listened to the rustling of the trees coming from the park, and after a while said quietly: "Pray, speak then!"

"Well, if you wish I must give in. For could I refuse you anything? Although it costs me such an effort. You could hardly believe. *Oh, mon Dieu!* how charming you look in that moonlight! Is he worthy of you? *Ah! ma chère la Vallière!* Do not pout, for they give you that name. If you could have such a residence as la Vallière had! I will tell you everything, my dear, although it is painful to me. Listen, then. . . . M. de Flahaut, the most unbearable gossip, although he is very well at Court, is madly in love with Anetka! Truly, I do not understand Potocka. Were he at least a marshal. Murat was courting her. . . ."

"And what about de Flahaut?"

"I met him yesterday in Vienna. We were talking about horoscopes for our country, and imagine that he assured me that it will be another Tilsit—with this difference, that it is not yet known who will play the part of Marie Louise. You understand? Then they say—pray do not take it too seriously—that Eléonore, bribed by the Austrian diplomacy, is preparing herself to play a scene . . . my dearest, you tremble! I told you it is damp . . . I shall finish, and we shall go in. I always hated that woman. But what could we do? She will throw herself at his feet, she will beseech him in the name of her son, and the man will believe her tears, as a man always does, and will wipe them by giving Austria our province. And who knows?"

"Have you finished?" asked Pani Walewska, with a strange intonation in her voice.

The Princess looked inquisitively at Pani Walewska's face, which was no longer bathed in moonlight, and could hardly be seen in the dark corner of the veranda, and replied with well-played simplicity: "No, my dear child, I have not finished yet, for could you think that, knowing about the danger threatening you, I should not take some steps to prevent it? It seems to you that I have no experience, and that I do not know that in such circumstances one must act, one must defend one's self? You know that I had several errands to do, *eh bien*, I have done nothing, for as soon as that gossip was told me about Eléonore I had myself driven at once to the Prince de Ligny's. He lives *incognito*, and how he suffers! How he still loves those Bourbons! It is moving! I do not share his ideas, but it is moving! Then the Prince suffers, for as you know he came to Vienna, not for the purpose of building arches to Bonaparte! De Ligny is Schwarzenberg's friend, and he is very devoted to me. I told him the whole truth, for we cannot let Eléonore do as she pleases. Then you have the right of precedence, and should anybody get any advantage from the treaty it must be you, my dearest, for you are in power.

"The Prince promised me faithfully to speak with Schwarzenberg about it. There is no doubt that Eléonore will be removed. They will not risk having an enemy in you, if they have an opportunity of having you as their ally. Naturally, I said that Mme. Walewska's terms could not be the same as some Mademoiselle's or Madame Eléonore's. Then they see, my dearest, that there is nothing lost, that the intrigue is frustrated, and that it depends on your goodwill to end it well."

"In a word, Princess, you advise me to act against the interests of my own country, to intrigue in favour of Austria, and to induce the Emperor to withdraw Poniatowski and his army from Galicia?"

"You interpret the whole affair wrong. There is no question what provinces should be taken or returned to Austria, but of having a material proof that it is done through you. The armistice is continued; the Emperor, as you said yourself, would like to return to Paris as soon as possible; Stadion is putting off —perhaps he is preparing a fresh alliance; in Spain the war is still raging, so that it is difficult to say who wishes for a treaty

most. At any rate, I have done the most difficult part. De Ligny will keep his word. . . . It is probable that to-morrow we shall have some news . . . well, speaking frankly, I expect at any minute a courier from Schwarzenberg. A disguised courier—I do not know myself how—he will bring you a letter and perhaps will ask for an answer."

"Then you are certain, Princess, that Schwarzenberg will send me a messenger?"

"Very certain."

"In that case I should at once give orders . . ."

"My dearest, you must not do that! Nobody must even suspect."

"I shall only speak with the officer on duty."

"What do you mean?"

"Simply this, that I cannot ask old John and the maids to struggle with some strapping Austrian."

"What do you propose to do, then?"

"To arrest the spy and hand him over to the gendarmes."

Princess Jablonowska rushed from the bench, and, crushing her hands, said rapidly: "Marie, child, consider! What an idea! But I shall not permit it! I shall not bear such levity. You can do what you please with regard to yourself, but you have no right to repay the Prince de Ligny in that way for his goodwill, to compromise me, to make me ridiculous. . . ."

"I am very sorry!"

"In that case it remains for me to inform the Prince at once."

"You shall not do it," said Pani Walewska quietly, but with determination.

"I cannot act otherwise. I should never forgive myself if the Prince should suffer because of me. Therefore, think it over. I am going to write the letter. I must perform this painful duty. . . ."

"You do not need to hasten."

"What? Marie! Is it possible that some good spirit whispered to you to have confidence in me, who love you so sincerely?"

Pani Walewska replied quietly—

"You misunderstand me, Princess! You forget that not a scrap of paper can enter or leave this house without first passing

through the Emperor's bureau, and this means that if you persevere in carrying out your plans, you would find yourself in the same position as that Austrian spy, should he come here."

The Princess was struck dumb, and she could only speak after a while.

"It surpasses all conception! For my self-sacrifice, for my devotion! *Oh, mon Dieu!* to threaten me! *C'est trop fort! Oh, je ne supporterais cela!* Water! Ah, if *ma pauvre mère* were living! Let some one unbutton me! Lord, nobody to unbutton! Could I expect such an *obligeance!*"

Pani Walewska called the servants. The Princess, in order to relax her irritation, complained, not paying any attention to the presence of the maids.

"De Ligny trusted me. I wanted to help her. Water! No, take it away. What are you doing? No, no, do not unbutton me, I am going at once! Send for a carriage. I am going, for I will not wait here for Eléonore! Rose, fan me! Pack my boxes at once. For my kindness to threaten me with arrest! *C'est brusque!* To frighten me!"

Notwithstanding her irritation, the Princess noticed that Pani Walewska went away.

"Has she gone?"

"Yes, your Highness. Shall I rub you with salts?"

"No; go to my bedroom, draw the blind, perfume it with lavender, light the lamps, and . . . you will tell me my fortune?"

"When will he come?"

"Rose, silence! Not a word. Help me. Malvina, on this side. Go slowly."

The maids did as they were told; they took the Princess by the arms and conducted her to her rooms.

The little house on the edge of Schoenbrunn Park became quiet. The lights disappeared one by one; evidently its inmates had retired. The park followed the example of the house. The crickets stopped their chirping, and but for the measured tread of the sentries, but for bayonets shining here and there over the thickets, it would have seemed that the charm of a July night had made everything sleepy, that it had stopped even the beating of human hearts. All at once a

clatter of horses' feet sounded in the depths of the park. The clatter increased until it became silent at the edge of the glen, stopped by a loudly pronounced: "*Qui vive?*"

"*Kleber et Marengo!*" proudly answered a sonorous voice.

"Shall I conduct you to the officer on duty, sir?"

"No; which way shall I turn?"

"To the right."

"Have they already retired?"

"I do not think so, sir; I saw a light a little while ago."

The officer went on towards the house. As he was dismounting before the portico the moon threw its light on him, and in that light one could see the purple colour and silver embroidery of his uniform, a large tuft and a gold plate on his bearskin.

Having dismounted, the officer hung the reins over the pommel of his saddle, and leaving the horse to himself, rapped energetically at the door.

After a while, and after some alarm in the house, which could be perceived by lights that appeared in several windows, the door opened and an old servant holding a lantern appeared in it.

"Pani Walewska lives here?" asked the new-comer in Polish.

The servant sank his head between his shoulders and looked at the officer in wonder.

"Do you not understand me?"

"Yes, it is here, your honour . . . only . . ."

"An urgent message!" said the officer sharply.

The man made a grimace, opened the door wider, invited the officer in, then trotted to a room, lighted a candle, and having returned to him, said: "If your honour will be so kind as to follow me."

The officer entered the little room, straightened out his uniform, clanged his spurs, caressed his moustache, and commanded: "Announce me to Pani Walewska. I am Paul Jerzmanowski, captain of the Light Horse of the Guards of His Majesty the Emperor."

The servant bowed respectfully, muttered significantly, and pushing a chair to the officer, said confidentially: "It was so dark, your honour, that I did not recognise the uniform—and such a beautiful one! It is a great festival for me to look at it with my old eyes."

The officer looked kindly with his sharp black eyes at the old servant.

"Thank you for your kind words."

The old man winked at him cunningly.

"We only see here the *chasseurs à cheval.* They are nice people, one must say, but impossible to exchange with them a word in human tongue."

"H'm, yes! Well, announce me, for I am in haste."

"I am sure there will be no answer."

"Go; go and be quick!"

The old man scratched his head and did not budge.

"Your honour, I may be trusted. I will give it to her ladyship faithfully. The gentlemen hand to me letters and I carry them to my lady, and before the orderly has time to empty a bottle I bring the answer."

The officer tugged impatiently at his moustache.

"*Sacré bleu!* Announce me to the lady, and do not take me for a messenger!"

"I beg of your worship," stammered the frightened servant, "those are my orders. My lady does not receive even a general. . . ."

The officer put his hand on the old man's shoulder, pressed it hard, and having turned him like a broom, said in his imperative voice—

"*Sacré bleu!* Announce me! If not, I shall announce myself!"

At such an argument the servant bowed and disappeared at the door.

The officer having remained alone, began to walk to and fro, clanging his spurs, tugging at his moustache, and looking from time to time at the door.

Evidently he came here on very important business, for there were deep wrinkles on his broad forehead.

A long moment passed before, after some noise in other rooms of the house, Jerzmanowski beheld an elderly lady wrapped in a dressing-gown, and with a dishevelled wig on her head, rushing into the room.

The captain of the Light Horse drew himself up, and then bent in a court bow.

"Madame," he began.

The lady did not permit him to speak further. She stretched out her bony hands with a dramatic movement, and whispered: "I know, I know all about it! Do not say a word to her! It would be in vain!"

Jerzmanowski, surprised at such an unexpected greeting, said impatiently: "Excuse me, Madame, but, upon my word, I do not understand anything, for hardly an hour since . . ."

"Yes, yes, but for God's sake not a word! Even here you are not very safe! I know for certain that they have already sent for the sentry. You must escape. Yes, yes, trust me, I shall save you. . . ."

"What! Save me? *Sacré bleu!* Excuse my camp expression, but what the deuce . . ."

The lady hung on the officer's arm and explained with pathetic terror: "Listen to me! I am Jablonowska! *Oui, c'est moi!* You brought a letter! Stoop a little, I will tell you in your ear! De Ligny, Schwarzenberg! Well now?"

Jerzmanowski looked stupefied at the Princess, trying in vain to understand the mysterious words. Jablonowska continued: "There is not a moment to lose! Consider, you will expose me to a danger, you will compromise the Prince! She is a dreadful woman! Only to-day I learned that! Imagine, she threatened to have me arrested, imprisoned! Where is the letter? Give it me. I will burn it! Do you hear? They are coming!"

The captain, stunned by the spasmodic outburst of the Princess, stood surprised, knowing less and less what she wanted of him.

As to the Princess, she having looked into the brown eyes of the handsome officer of the Light Horse, concluded with despairing determination: "I will not allow you to get into trouble! Where is the paper? I must have it! Be quick! I will burn it! It must not reach her hands! Wait, something is rustling here under your uniform! It must be the letter!"

"But, Madame," protested the officer, seeing that the Princess meant to search him.

"Do not be afraid for me. Think of yourself. Here it is! I shall not give it to her. I shall not permit you to suffer on account of me."

And before the officer had noticed, the Princess seized the order of service which he was carrying under his uniform, and disappeared with it.

The officer could hardly control his surprise at all this, thinking that the lady must be half mad, when Pani Walewska appeared in the doorway. The captain, recognising her, bowed.

"My due respect, Madame. I am Jerzmanowski, captain of the Light Horse of His Imperial Majesty. I had the honour to be introduced to you at Prince Borghese's ball. A very urgent affair forces me to trouble you."

Speaking thus, the captain drew himself up, rattled his silver belt, clattered his sword, and clashed his spurs. Pani Walewska nodded slightly to the officer's bow, and then said coolly and distinctly: "I am surprised that you have accepted such an errand!"

"What am I to understand?" answered the officer, offended.

"Have you a letter?"

"A letter! But, poor man, he cannot move his arm!"

Pani Walewska smiled ironically.

"Do not think I shall assume the rôle of inquisitor, but in the meanwhile you must know that I have chosen the road shown to me by duty. The letter will be found, even if you have succeeded in handing it to Princess Jablonowska."

The officer made an impatient movement, understanding that he had fallen into a whirlpool of some mystification.

"But, Madame, I do not understand one word of all that. A little while ago some lady in tears rushed at me, and, clasping her hands, told me that she would rescue me from some peril. To the deuce! I came here not secretly, but with a password and on a mission. . . ."

"Then Princess Jablonowska has taken the writing?" interrupted Pani Walewska feverishly.

"Yes, she seized it from under my uniform."

"It is true, I have taken it!" resounded the Princess's screeching voice triumphantly.

Pani Walewska turned to the Princess, and said—

"I believe, Princess, that having understood the importance of that document, you will give it back?"

"That document does not exist any longer!"

"*Sacré bleu!*"

"Do not be afraid! I could not allow the name of the noble de Ligny to be dishonoured on account of my indiscretion, and your self-sacrifice to be exposed to the maliciousness of a person who does not understand her own good."

"Princess!" Pani Walewska remonstrated.

The Princess half closed her eyes, and said with force: "That document does not exist any longer; I have burnt it!"

At this Pani Walewska started, while the officer grew purple, and burst out—

"*Sacré bleu!* that paper was the service order for to-morrow! I received it from the general staff as I came here, and I have not had even time to look at it. Upon my honour, it is very serious!"

"Allow me, sir," said Pani Walewska, who began to understand. "Then to what have I to attribute your tardy visit?"

The officer dropped his head, deep wrinkles appeared on his forehead.

"I came here on a sad errand. An old comrade, a friend, is dying, and he made me promise to bring you his last greeting. . . ."

The officer became silent suddenly, turned his face away, and tugged at his moustache.

Pani Walewska grew pale, and, having dropped her head, seemed to wait for the dying man's name. The officer of the Light Horse stood silent.

The stillness was only interrupted by the rustling of the dress of the Princess, who listened eagerly to such an unexpected ending to the de Ligny-Schwarzenberg intrigue.

"And what more?" said Pani Walewska with an effort.

The officer answered sadly—

"That is all!"

"But I must know . . ."

The officer breathed deeply, and began to speak at first gently and then more distinctly. "He had never been well," said the officer; "he was always sad, on that account we called him 'Sniveller,' but we all loved him, for he was a very good-hearted and ambitious fellow. When he joined the army he became an example to the whole regiment; he was the first one

up and he went to bed last; he worked constantly, and cared for his soldiers as for his own children. If a soldier was wronged, he would bother a marshal until justice was done, until a reward was granted, until the mischief was forgiven. When he rode at the head of his squadron of horse it seemed that he would not be able to ride a mile, so weak he continually was. But as soon as the signal for attack was given, then he rushed with such impetuosity that nobody could equal him. Such he was! He would cough and would speak only in a whisper, but as soon as a command was given he would rush first into the whirlpool, and be the bravest amongst the bravest. He was called 'Sniveller,' but he would go first into the fire—would rush to meet the balls. One of them he found at Rioseco, another at Madrid, a third one at Eckmühl, and the last one at Wagram. He was taken to the ambulance. The news spread in the regiment that he had been trampled under the horses' feet. His own soldiers did not see him when he disappeared. Only about ten days after news came to the general staff that he was alive. Dautancourt sent Girardot at once with an ambulance and the order to bring him to Lanzensdorf. Girardot remained for five days, and returned with the 'Sniveller.' I wanted to see him at once, but I had not a minute to spare. I only learned from Zaluski that the 'Sniveller's' shoulder was wounded—not very dangerously—and that he had a fever.

"To-day, about noon, when I was coming back from service with my squadron of horse, Fredro rushed to me and said: 'The Sniveller wishes to see you.' A bad presentiment took hold of me, and I rushed at a gallop. In half an hour I was at the house in Lanzendorf. Girardot met me. How is he? What? The surgeon dropped his eyes and said that the wound was a dangerous one. I looked at Girardot and thought that he had become a madman. I did not believe the medical man's croaking. I swore to myself, and rushed to the room. 'How are you, Sniveller?' I shouted from the threshold. The room was half dark; he was lying in his bed. I began to joke at the Sniveller, who nodded to me, smiled, and said that he was going on half-pay. It sounded strange to me, but I did not show it, and approved his intention, and wishing to amuse him, began to

tell about the last review at Schoenbrunn. Suddenly he seized me by the hand, and said: 'Excuse me, my half-pay is coming on. There is not much time left, and I have still much to do. I wanted to ask you to carry my greetings to those I loved, and send my things away!' 'Sniveller, *sacré bleu!* that stupid shot has made you feverish.' The Sniveller made a movement, took off the bandage, and showing his bluish arm, said: 'To be sure it is stupid; it does not even bleed. I have lost so much blood that there is not a drop left in me. Formerly it used to come out even from my mouth, to-day it does not come even from the wound. I hoped to find a piece of lead that would quench my life at once, but in vain; even the bullets would not kill such a man as I am. They only notched me, poured out all my blood, and now I must wither.' 'To the deuce! You covered, not only yourself, but the whole regiment with glory. You exposed yourself too much, you did not wish to listen to honest advice!' 'For I could not . . . here in my chest it burned me.' The Sniveller stretched his thin, bony arms to me, and said in a whisper: 'Paul, I wish to make a confession to you. You are strong, your heart and soul are sound; and I, although I followed your war cries, wanted to quench the grief that was devouring me, I was searching for oblivion; I was a Judas in our regiment. You went to death to give proofs of your bravery, to show your gratitude to Napoleon, while I amongst you was a selfish man, who wished to die like a hero, while I was only a wretch deceived by love, pushed away by a woman! Apparently I was one of you, but in fact I was a stranger. And it is done now! It was not permitted to me to carry the secret of my selfishness to the grave!' He became silent, and it seemed to me that he was delirious. I tried to comfort him. He listened patiently, till at last he interrupted me, beseeching me to do his last wish. I promised. He ordered a light to be brought in. He sat on his bed, and having taken out from under his shirt a miniature, asked me whether I knew the person it represented. I was surprised; the portrait of a beautiful lady seemed familiar to me. The Sniveller said: 'She is not far from here! Do not deny it, I know it for certain! If she knew, perhaps she would not refuse. . . . I shall not complain and make any reproaches; she shall not hear one complaint, she shall not see even a shade

of grief. . . . I wish only to take leave of her, and tell her that, knowing her sorrow, I would render her a last service! Go and tell her! Hasten, for perhaps I shall not live till morning! His request seemed to me impossible. I tried persuasion. The Sniveller fainted. I did not know what to do, for I had engaged my word. I left Girardot with the Sniveller, and rushed to headquarters to the Grand Marshal of the Court. Duroc was very kind to me, and although he could not give me permission, he did not spare me some advice, and did not dissuade me from taking my chance. I rushed here at once to you, Madame, and here I am."

Pani Walewska, who during this long narrative seemed to be changed into a statue, sighed deeply. From her lips came a quiet, trembling whisper.

"But you did not say his name. . . . I do not know who he is. I am afraid to make conjectures. . . ."

The officer became red, his eyes filled with tears, the breathing seemed to be stopped in his chest.

For a while he was fighting with emotion, till at last he tugged at his shoulder-belt, and said in a hoarse voice—

"Madame, Gorayski is dying!"

After that exclamation there was quiet in the room. The officer dropped his head, Pani Walewska stood motionless, cold, looking at the purple facings of his uniform—only it seemed that the lively hue of the purple irritated her eyes, for her eyelids quivered, and her eyelashes moved.

"How far from here?" she asked suddenly.

"About one hour."

"Shall we arrive in time?"

"I do not know."

"I will go at once!"

Pani Walewska rushed from the room. The officer cleared his throat, took out a handkerchief and began to wipe his forehead, and then turned towards the door leading to the antechamber. He was, however, stopped by the Princess.

"Very well! Splendid!" the latter said in rapture. "What an experience! What a clever stratagem!"

"What?" muttered the officer.

"I guessed your ruse at once. Only such ways are good

with her! I tell you that she had already informed the sentries. I admire your idea. Do not be afraid—the paper does not exist."

The officer did not answer, and rushed to the vestibule, leaving the Princess to her reflections. Such behaviour from the messenger of Schwarzenberg cooled the Princess at once, and turned her imagination in another direction. Suppose that officer really came in the name of Gorayski? Suppose Gorayski . . .? In that case one must act.

The Princess had already her plan of action, and when Pani Walewska appeared ready to go, the Princess said sarcastically: "I am much vexed that you wish to hazard your reputation."

"I do not understand."

"H'm! . . . but it is not difficult. At night, with an officer to see another officer. . . ."

"It seems to me that I am my own mistress."

"Certainly. Only if the Emperor hears about that expedition, although a very military one, and in your position doubly imprudent. . . ."

"It is not you, but I who shall be responsible."

"You forget that moral duty forces me . . ."

"To try to induce me to intrigue with the Prince de Ligny."

The Princess made an angry movement.

"But not to such expeditions."

Pani Walewska shrugged her shoulders contemptuously and went into the vestibule, not paying any attention to the Princess's face contorted with malice.

In front of the vestibule, besides the captain's horse, stood two others brought by John.

The Chamberlain's wife nodded to the officer of the Light Horse, and, helped by him, mounted her horse; the captain and John jumped on theirs.

The officer turned to Pani Walewska, who understood his movement, and said: "Show the way."

The captain went ahead, Pani Walewska and John following him.

The glen was filled with the trampling of horses' hoofs. The surrounding depths of the park answered that trampling with a long rustling. Shadows came out from behind the

thickets, monotonous voices were heard here and there, the captain's several answers sounded in the interval, and the three riders disappeared among the trees.

Jerzmanowski rushed forward, looking behind him from time to time as if wishing to hurry Pani Walewska, who, without a word of protest, kept up with him; only when they turned from the main road on a stony country road, the Chamberlain's wife said hesitatingly—

"Permit me . . . I must slacken. . . . Is it far still?"

The captain drew in his horse and pointed at a hill in the distance.

"There is Lanzensdorf. We can reach it in a quarter of an hour."

"Is there really no hope?" asked Pani Walewska.

"Girardot says so. Yesterday Dautancourt wished to bring Larrey to the Sniveller, but they gave up the useless trouble. The wound does not bleed any more. *Sacré bleu!* I never saw a more villainous one. It is bluish, swollen, and it is not painful. They burned it with hot iron, but they did not succeed in bringing out any blood. Well, it flowed from the Sniveller, through his wounds and his mouth, till there is no more of it in him."

Jerzmanowski became silent; he pushed his shako on one side and laughed gloomily.

"They promoted him, they promised him a cross, but he will sooner get a wooden one on his grave. If he had been struck by a cannon-ball—well, such is a soldier's lot! But no, he is lying like a log, and must wait until it deigns to come. Pfuy! And if one begins to think, how and who it shall be . . . then . . . *Sacré bleu!* one minute of torture will seem to one a couple of years. There is no order in this world. Well, this way! There in the light."

The captain spurred his horse and went ahead again, in the direction of a house that stood on a hill.

In front of the house Jerzmanowski reined in his horse and threw the bridle to an orderly, who at sight of an officer rushed out from the door; then he went towards Pani Walewski, who was coming up with John.

"Allow me, Madame, to tell him about your coming."

Pani Walewska stopped. The captain rushed into the house and returned quickly.

"Well?" asked Pani Walewska with uneasiness.

"He is asleep, Girardot says. . . . He is an idiot!" burst out the officer angrily. "He is clever as long as he does not see death, *sacré bleu!* Pray, follow me."

Pani Walewska followed the captain, who introduced her into a room dimly lighted with a tallow candle, in the light of which she could not even see a group of officers sitting quietly —then opened another door, and with a gesture of his hand he asked her to enter.

Pani Walewska made a few steps forward and found herself in a large square room, the furniture of which was composed of a modest pine bed, a table and two benches. Three tallow candles lighted the room so feebly that Pani Walewska required a few minutes to see the objects surrounding her. As for Jerzmanowski, he seemed to be at home here, for he went straight to the bed, looked at it, and, moved by some thought, walked to the window, at which a tall man could be discerned.

"Wasilewski, *sacré bleu!*" he said, trying to control his wrath. "You put the full uniform on him!"

"The captain himself ordered it."

"And what did Girardot say? He is a painted doll! The collar would choke him. Tfuy! You donkeys! And what is that?"

"A piece of consecrated wax-candle."

"Tfuy! Tfuy!" spat Jerzmanowski, looking still more threateningly at the sergeant standing erect. "You are almost grey, and still you are stupid. You should have brought a priest to him."

"According to order—he just left."

"What? A priest?" exclaimed Jerzmanowski.

"Well, according to our Christian custom . . ."

Jerzmanowski made an impatient movement and went into a dark corner of the room.

At that moment Pani Walewska, having grown used to the dusk, came to the bed on which Captain Gorayski was lying. But hardly had she looked at his face when she staggered, and was obliged to lean on the foot of the bed so as to prevent her-

self from falling. In the meanwhile, the Chamberlain's wife looked with astonishment at the captain's yellow, cadaverous, motionless face, which even the reflection of the purple facing of the gala uniform could not animate. Was it really Gorayski, that bashful but always cheerful playmate of her childhood? Was this that sentimental youth who was in love with her even then, when she was still living in her parents' house? Was this that cavalier full of self-denial, who was the first to warn her of the abyss towards which she was being dragged by her family's calculations? Was this that noble man, who had tried in vain to change her sisterly sentiment into another, and who, in order to forget his disenchantment, had gone to the war to find forgetfulness? Then that face covered with deep wrinkles, withered, marked with suffering, the face of the twenty-five-year-old officer of the Guards, of the knight who used to rush into the fire, of an enthusiast risking his life?

Pani Walewska passed her hand over her eyes as if wishing to chase away a nightmare. Gorayski made a movement—an attack of awful coughing moved the uniform buttoned over his hollow chest. From the head of the bed rose the physician and approached a glass with some potion to the captain's lips. Gorayski pressed his lips eagerly to the glass and drank avidly. Then he breathed and whispered: "Is it late?"

"After midnight."

"Has he returned yet?"

The surgeon wished to answer, when suddenly Gorayski's eyelids quivered, the eyes opened wide and became full of life. "You are here! You are. . . . I was sure! You did not refuse!"

Pani Walewska drew nearer.

"I have just heard that you are ill, and I took the liberty of coming to see you, and asking you if I could do anything for you."

The Chamberlain's wife, feeling Gorayski's fiery look, dropped her eyes and blushed.

"Always beautiful. . . . As beautiful as ever! I dreamed of you so, so I wished to see you once more."

"You must take care of yourself—not talk too much, for it tires you," she tried to persuade him.

Gorayski made an impatient movement.

"No, it gives me strength. Jerzmanowski! Where is he? A . . . pray, leave us alone. Wait; put me near the window. So! And now leave us. . . ."

Jerzmanowski, followed by the surgeon and the sergeant, left the room quietly.

Gorayski was silent for a while, and then said in a whisper: "Mary, forgive me for daring to disturb the quiet of this lovely July night. . . . I am going away, but it is not for this reason that I troubled you. Were I burning with desire to see you, I could have controlled that wish, and I would not have sent for you to Schoenbrunn. It is not of myself that I wish to talk. Give me your hand. Do you feel how cold mine is growing? You live in Schoenbrunn, so Fate wished. May it not be too hard at least for you. Well, perhaps your lot would have been not so hard if not for your brother. Do not accuse him—do not judge him; the surprise was too cruel. I saw him before the first Spanish campaign. We had several long talks, till finally he swore to me that if I were of the same opinion in a year's time he would give in. He was going to the front. Before leaving he gave me this ring as a token. I accepted it on condition that it was to be an agreed sign between us. Here is our compact: if I had no chance of seeing him, or if, when dying, I still upheld my ideas about you, I was to give you this ring. It will open the door of your parents' house to you, as well as your brother's heart. Take it from me. I wished to send it to you by a friend, but I preferred to spare you. . . ."

"I thank you," answered Pani Walewska, in a muffled voice. "I appreciate your good intentions, but I do not think that I shall need that enchanting ring. All is over between Paul and me."

Gorayski pressed Pani Walewska's hand.

"Mary, for God's sake do not speak in that way! He is your brother, he loves you. He is a soldier. He was in the Polish legions. He did not know anything about intrigues. A thunderbolt struck him. It did not spare even his soldier's honour. He was in despair. Do you think he does not love you, that he did not wish to justify you? In me he wished to find an affirmation of his thoughts, and he found it. He wanted time to

become accustomed to that idea. Mary, do not follow your pride. He is your brother. There may come a time when you will need his heart. Look at me, how much stronger and better I could have been had I had a sister who could share my sorrows. . . ."

"You have a sister," interrupted Pani Walewska, with feeling, and bent to the captain's hand.

Gorayski smiled bitterly.

"You alone I wished not to have for a sister."

An excess of coughing tore the captain's chest again.

Pani Walewska handed him a glass with a potion. Gorayski hardly touched it with his lips, and pushed it aside.

"It will not quench."

"Does the wound burn?" asked Pani Walewska solicitously.

"Yes," answered the captain, with an effort, and then, animated by a thought, he asked abruptly: "Then you will see Paul, you will be reconciled to him? You are hesitating. . . ."

"But if he perseveres . . ."

"No! the sooner you do it, the shorter you will make his suffering. Believe me, he suffered much . . . very much. Do you promise?"

"Yes."

"Very well. Press my hand. Thank you. That is all I wished to tell you. All. . . .!"

Gorayski dropped his head on the pillows.

Pani Walewska looked with painful astonishment at the captain's face, vainly searching in her mind for some word of consolation. After a while she said hesitatingly: "Could I do anything for you? I should be so glad."

Gorayski shook his head.

"No, nothing; I do not need anything. Pray forgive me for having troubled you. I would not have dared, if not for that. . . . Forgive me if sometimes by look or word . . . but sometimes baseness takes hold of a man. I remember at that ball. . . . I was a scoundrel. . . . I was mad. . . . I persecuted you with my reproaches, accusations, suspicions. . . . I was embittered by my wild imagination. Forget! Forgive me!"

Pani Walewska made a nervous movement. Her face became pale.

She knelt at his bedside, put her hand on his forehead, and said: "Do not speak in that way to me. Do not wound me. You were always a brother to me. I respected you; you had my friendship. The more I knew your magnanimity, the more I regretted that I had crossed your road, that unwittingly I was the cause of your suffering, that I disturbed your peace. . . ."

The captain rose with an effort, his eyes shone again.

"Mary, is a star to be blamed if it attracts by its lustre, if it makes one blind, if it draws the soul beyond the worlds?"

"Your sentiment," went on Pani Walewska in a trembling voice, "weighed on me like a stone. I prayed the Almighty to take it from you, or . . . to awake in me an answer. Yes, I did pray. The thought that you suffered through me, that for long years I could not understand your intentions, was a continual reproach to me. Not being able to give you my heart I wished to increase my sisterly affection. Unfortunately, I only persuaded myself that I made your suffering keener. Then I tried to repulse you by my indifference; I strove to make you have the worst opinion of me possible. Wilfully I ignored your good advice; at last I surrounded myself with inaccessibility. Do you remember when, two years ago, you were wounded? Do you think it was easy for me to put on the mask of indifference? No; I was afraid to arouse in you a hope—I did not wish to rekindle your already dying sentiment for me. . . . Therefore forgive me! . . . It is difficult to command a heart. The enormity of the wrong done you crushes me—it frightens me. Only to-day I realised how much you suffer. And all through me, and for me."

The captain made a deprecating movement.

"It is not true," he protested in a hoarse voice.

"Yes," continued Pani Walewska, with a painful emotion, "the curse reached even those whom I loved, to whom I wished well. It is awful!"

"And I tell you it is not true! I—I never loved you! . . . Do you hear me? . . ."

Pani Walewska raised her head and looked in stupefaction at Gorayski's face, that shivered with the mortal effort of life; it was feverish, it quivered with pain.

"You did not love me?" she asked with astonishment.

"Never!" cried the captain, with a wrathful outburst.

Gorayski's voice vibrated with such determination, with such strength, with such mercilessness, that a cold shiver ran through Pani Walewska; the whole building of her ideas about the captain fell in ruins. She smiled sadly, dropped her eyes, and began to search in the depths of her soul for an explanation. Was it possible that she had misunderstood him, that she had made such a mistake? The Chamberlain's wife not being able to find answers to these questions, having failed to understand such a change, looked at Gorayski as if she wished to find on his face the solution of the riddle. But hardly did she raise her silky eyelashes, hardly did she glance at the captain, than a cry of awe came out of her mouth.

Gorayski was lying with dropped head, with half-closed eyes; brownish, coagulated blood was on his lips, while from his throat was coming a hoarse rattle.

At Pani Walewska's scream the surgeon, followed by Jerzmanowski and the sergeant, rushed into the room. The surgeon bent over Gorayski and began to administer salts to him. Jerzmanowski went to Pani Walewska, helped her to rise, and conducted her to another room, where he left her with an officer of the Light Horse, and then returned to Gorayski. At that moment the surgeon put aside the salts, and having looked at the dying man's face, put his hand under his uniform.

Jerzmanowski frowned.

"What? How is he?"

"He is dying."

Jerzmanowski snorted and said angrily—

"Listen, Girardot! *Sacré bleu*, do not assume the countenance of a grave-digger! . . . he is breathing. . . ."

The surgeon took the dying man's hand, felt his pulse, then said quietly—

"He is dead!"

"Dead!" repeated Jerzmanowski mournfully, leaned against the wall, and looked in bewilderment at the comrade who was growing stiff.

Girardot sighed, and said quietly to Jerzmanowski: "Captain, be careful, do not strain yourself; remember your own wound."

"What then?" muttered the officer angrily.

Girardot shook the captain's hand.

"Better go away. Poor man, he could not live! Consumption! And in addition to that they pierced his feeble chest."

"You think . . ." said Jerzmanowski, and again looked at the dead comrade without finishing his phrase. Girardot dropped his head.

"I have expected it for a long time. That wound received at Wagram was not mortal—grief killed him. A brave soldier, a good comrade! Well, I must report to the general staff."

And he went slowly towards the door. Here, having met the sergeant, he whispered something to him and went out.

Jerzmanowski did not notice Girardot's absence, being absorbed by strange thoughts that suddenly rushed into his head.

"He is dead!" repeated the captain. "Well, he is not the first and not the last. Many others were taken from the ranks. This one was at least wounded several times, while some were like Dembinski, who fell from his horse during a march, and all was over with him. Not everybody dies in the same way, although everyone must die. *Sacré bleu!* such is the law. The worst is to die slowly, for then one behaves like a woman—one prattles; then the priest . . . tfuy! . . . In Rome there is a crowd of saints and what . . . The Legion went where it was to go. One cannot avoid death. . . . What a pity that the Sniveller is dead! But it is not unusual—provided it come at once. One is swept away, they pity you, they sigh after you, they talk about you at the camp fires, some one cries for you at home and that is all. Then you shine with your captainship, you cling, you shout in the squadron, and you think that if you are not there it is a great loss. If you are not there, there is another! Six lieutenants would be glad to exchange their epaulettes. Well, he was a good comrade. Pity, *sacré bleu!* . . ."

Jerzmanowski stopped that stream of thoughts, for he noticed that the sergeant was feverishly busy.

At first Jerzmanowski wanted to scold him, and to tell him that he was behaving inproperly; but having understood the soldier's doings, restrained himself, and looked at him attentively.

The sergeant moved swiftly about. He took off the blanket, arranged the bed; then he put on Gorayski the purple full-dress trousers and buttoned them under the uniform, which he smoothed; he arranged the aiguillettes; then he slipped the silver cartridge-box over the left shoulder, and having girded Gorayski with a white leather belt, he twisted twice round his body a white and purple scarf with silver tassels. Here he stopped, looked sharply at his work, and worked further.

Jerzmanowski smiled with satisfaction, thinking—

"What a dexterous knave! Such an old wolf of the regiment! He has forgotten nothing."

He bound the dead man's chin, so that the jaw should not hang, closed his eyes, and put two coins on the eyelids; the shako, the sword, and a pair of pistols he put at the foot of the bed, and the white mantle he stuck in so adroitly under the body, that under it the modest bedding disappeared. Everything he dusted, cleaned, polished. He had not forgotten boots and spurs. He even found a comb and arranged the dead man's hair and moustache.

"He almost has it! *Grande tenue,* on the cloak! Honestly, according to order!" muttered Jerzmanowski.

But as it seemed, the sergeant was not of the captain's opinion, for he lighted a candle, he went to a corner, arranged his uniform, put on the shako, girded a sword, and came to the bed with military gait, stretched himself erect, and raised his hand to the visor.

The sergeant's grey eyes shone, his hand slightly shook, his chest heaved.

"I humbly report that everything is according to order," sounded in the quiet the sergeant's quivering voice.

Something seized Jerzmanowski by the throat.

In the meanwhile the sergeant made a half movement, and with the same military gait he went to the corner, where he took off his shako, ungirded the sword, and began to search for something in a box.

Jerzmanowski muttered—

"The rogue knows the service, and he has everything he needs!"

But hardly had the captain come to himself by that con-

clusion, and thought that it would be time to return to his squadron, when the sergeant came out from the shadows and approached the body, this time without the shako, and almost bent.

Jerzmanowski grew impatient.

"What more has he found?"

The sergeant did not pay any attention to the captain's impatient movements, and put some object into Gorayski's hands. Then he knelt, and began to pray in a muffled voice.

Jerzmanowski bit his lips.

"Fanatic!"

"Lord, give him eternal rest!" said the sergeant.

"Sexton!" muttered the captain.

"Grant him eternal light . . ."

"Tfuy! He recollects, *sacré bleu!* . . . He had better join the Capucin monks! I do not want such a soldier in my squadron! Wasilewski!" he called to the sergeant.

The sergeant crossed himself without any haste, passed his sleeve over his face, and then, having noticed the captain, he drew himself up as if on duty.

"What, you old booby!" said the captain, trying to be severe.

"All according to order, sir!"

"H'm! . . . you, *sacré bleu!* . . . A . . . what have put into his hands?"

"I, sir?"

"Of course, it is not I! Well, here, here!" grumbled the captain.

The sergeant stretched his hands towards the dead man, took from his hands a small object and handed it to the captain.

"What is it?"

"Blessed Virgin of Czenstochowa, sir!"

Jerzmanowski's face became scarlet; he looked at the little picture and tugged at his moustache.

"Well . . . and . . . *sacré bleu!* upon my word I could not think. H'm!"

The captain turned from the sergeant and went to the open window. There, from beyond undulating hills, the sky was growing brighter, the light was chasing the darkness and quenching the stars.

Jerzmanowski looked to the west, a big tear suspended on his eyelashes, and his thoughts embraced his childhood.

And there rose before him the figure of his father, a proud nobleman, who never bent before anybody, whose severe face had never shown weakness even during the most trying moments of his life. Only when from the blue space there came the sounds of a church bell, then in such moments that stalwart man would bend before an image of the blessed Virgin of Czenstochowa.

Jerzmanowski sighed, turned to the sergeant suddenly, and said hesitatingly: "Listen, old man. . . ."

"Yes, sir."

"When I . . . Well, then . . ."

The sergeant looked at the captain.

"You understand, well . . . a beastly cannon-ball . . . then you also . . . me too. . . . For although it helps the dead man no better than incense . . . one must have the Virgin of Czenstochowa, *sacré bleu!*"

. . . . . .

That day Napoleon got up earlier than usual, so that Constant was hardly ready to dress his master, and Corvisart, instead of finding the Emperor being shaved, as usual, found him already dressed and asking for Méneval.

Corvisart, with the ability of an old courtier, guessed the Emperor's bad humour, and withdrew discreetly. The Emperor did not say a word to him, entered his study and sat at his desk, covered with papers.

All the inhabitants of Schoenbrunn Castle trembled. There was a dead silence in ante-chambers, in service rooms, and even in the apartments occupied by ministers and marshals; the aides-de-camps' faces were long; the officers of the staff and employés gloomy; the generals waiting for an audience; the officers who had come with reports looked at each other hesitatingly.

Napoleon was working with the energy that crushed Méneval; that made changes in the army and administration; that reached the boundaries of Europe and surprised the world. The papers quivered in Napoleon's hands. His pen threw on them short decisions; the couriers rushed in and out with

voluminous letters. The employés of the Emperor's bureau worked faster than ever, for the thunderbolt was threatening to strike anybody among them.

After two hours' work the Emperor rose and paced the room. Méneval lifted his head slightly and looked at his master.

The Emperor caught his secretary's look.

"Is there anybody waiting?"

"Herr von Bubna, the Emperor Francis's aide-de-camp."

"What does he want? I told him yesterday! They wish for more war; they shall have it!"

"He has brought new propositions."

"Afternoon! I have no time! Any news from Saronne?"

"Nothing. . . . The Pope holds on! Prince Rovigo writes . . ."

"That he has made a new blunder!"

"He has intercepted some correspondence from Rome."

"He wishes to prevent the Pope from communicating with his clergy! It is an extreme measure—unnecessary. Write to him at once!"

Méneval bent over a sheet of paper, and executed the order. Napoleon went to a side table loaded with correspondence, and began to open the letters and read them.

Evidently there was nothing of importance in them, for Napoleon glanced at them more and more rapidly. Suddenly from between two large envelopes slipped a small one. The Emperor opened it and began to read a long letter.

He became gloomy.

"Where is this from?"

Méneval rushed from behind the table.

"This letter? I do not know, Sire! I will find out immediately. . . . "

"You do not know! None of you know what is going on around you!" the Emperor scolded, finishing the letter.

Méneval stood like a block of stone.

In the meanwhile, Napoleon read the letter again, and when he had finished his face was blue. Méneval grew pale.

"Call Duroc," cried Bonaparte.

Méneval rushed out. Napoleon read the letter a third time, as if not wishing to believe his own eyes. The Marshal of the Court appeared in the doorway.

"You called me, Sire?" he said quietly.

Napoleon threw the letter on the table, and said passionately: "Read this! I am sure there is more truth in it than you would suppose! Well, read it!"

Duroc took the letter quietly, and read it.

The Emperor strode to and fro, speaking angrily.

"What? A lovely letter! Rejoice at it! It needed an anonymous letter to discover that! If it were not for that scoundrel or intriguer, she might laugh at me to my face! And you do not know anything about it! You did not expect that. Mme. Walewska! Ha! ha! ha! A woman like the others. No better than the others! You are surprised, eh?"

Duroc stood quietly under the fire of the Emperor's ironical looks.

"Not at all, Sire," the Grand Marshal of the Court answered simply. "I have a report with me about the matter."

"Ah! A report, which arrives after the anonymous denunciation."

"Only for this reason, that it contains the truth; and that truth does not tarnish Mme. Walewska's honour in the slightest way. His Majesty will be kind enough to read. . . ."

The Emperor seized the paper from Duroc's hands.

"Report! Ah! She went out. Yes, to Lanzensdorf! The anonymous letter says the same, word for word."

"But it says that there was a *rendezvous*," rejoined Duroc.

The Emperor did not answer that remark, and read the report attentively.

"H'm! A fine conclusion; if they did not deceive each other! A dying playmate of her childhood! . . . the last adieu! Comedy! Order an investigation!"

"It is done! Here is the report of the Colonel of the Light Horse of the Guard about the captain's death."

"He died?"

"This morning, Sire. He was recommended for the cross and promotion. . . ."

"Gorayski! I do not remember that name. H'm! But it must be as you say. . . ."

The Emperor walked across the room again as if pondering over something. Then he stopped before Duroc.

"You are right. Never she! All of them, but not she! What a villainous calumny! Yes, the more I think, the more I wonder at myself for being carried away by a suspicion. Duroc, no other woman was ever as dear to me as she! Never! She alone . . .!"

"Yes, it is so, Sire."

"Wait, I must reward her for that . . . yes, I must! She does not know that I doubted, but I know and that suffices. Duroc, think it over! We must . . ."

"Sire, the task oversteps my ability, for until now, as your Majesty knows, Mme. Walewska has not accepted any presents, and I do not know if she would change her mind."

The Emperor became sincerely sorrowful, and continued in a confidential tone: "Yes, and that sometimes makes me angry. I should like to do something, but in vain. What extraordinary disinterestedness! I had good intentions towards her brother, but you know how unfortunately it ended with him. On the other hand, she continues to have confidence in me. You know what I am thinking about. She has such confidence that sometimes I shiver. Perhaps I pushed my promise too far. Well, she deserves to have the whole world laid at her feet. Unfortunately I must count with events. You know very well how much I would like to take Galicia from Austria and join it to the Principality of Warsaw! But who knows if it would be diplomatic? In a word, nothing for her! Nothing whatever!"

"According to my opinion, Sire, if your Majesty's sentiment has not cooled . . ."

"I should then be the foe of my own happiness."

"Then, your Majesty could be certain that she would appreciate your goodwill . . . a loving woman . . ."

"You are right. Wait, what time is it?"

"Ten o'clock, Sire."

"I cannot now; but in the afternoon. You will go with me. She likes you very much—she always speaks well of you."

"Sire!"

"That bore, von Bubna, is waiting for me! Come to lunch, and we will dine with her. Send me that tiresome von Bubna! I wonder what new political combination he has brought?"

Duroc bowed and retreated towards the door. The Emperor recollected something suddenly.

"Permit me . . . one moment! Ah! Have you taken that anonymous letter?"

"I wish to burn it together with the report!"

"H'm!" said the Emperor, after a movement of hesitation, "you must keep them . . . they may be useful!"

"These . . . these . . . scraps?"

"Well, yes; can you not think? I have nothing to hide from you. In case a favourable answer comes from St. Petersburg, I must take steps for divorce at once; and much more, I must not permit the spreading of news about my private relations. The Grand Duchess is, as it seems, a little sentimental. She may dislike it, that I do not regulate my affairs of that kind. Therefore it will be necessary to send Mme. Walewska away. I should like to avoid all explanations. One must give her some pretext for the rupture . . . although it will not be a rupture. And these papers will furnish good material for a diversion, and afterwards for a reconciliation."

Duroc looked at the Emperor in astonishment. Napoleon made an impatient movement.

"You do not like that? You may think it is a barbarous way, but it is better than explanations and scenes. I do not wish to see her tears, I cannot stand them."

"But they will only be more abundant, Sire. The consciousness of unjust suspicion will make her grieve. . . ."

"But, then, she will think that the disgrace was in consequence of an intrigue."

"She cannot be prevented from hearing about the wedding."

"As about a political step. She is prepared for it partly, but should she be obliged to leave here suddenly . . . I should have plenty of reproaches and tears. Do as I said!"

"You command, Sire!"

"Well, well, do not be sour. It could not be helped; sometimes with one's nearest one can do nothing without a subterfuge. Yes, keep the report and the letter, and in the meanwhile send me von Bubna and Ménéval."

The Emperor smiled, and the whole of Schoenbrunn, gloomy and silent till then, was filled with joy; joy was depicted in

the courtiers' eyes; joy animated the martial faces of generals, aides-de-camp, and officers of the staff.

In the meanwhile the sun was hidden under a cloud; the castle, park, guard-houses, bright uniforms of the Guards, the amaranth facings of the Light Horse, and the turbans of the Mamelukes were covered with a grey shadow.

But Schoenbrunn did not care for the gloomy sky if Roustan, standing at the door of the Emperor's study, smiled, showing his white teeth. There was the sun of Schoenbrunn.

CHAPTER XVII

PAN ANASTAZY WALEWSKI looked into a mirror, moved his toothless jaws impatiently, and scolded Baptiste, who stood behind him.

"I said it is bad! The bow is crooked."

"It can't be otherwise!" muttered the valet angrily.

"It must be—do you hear! I wish it—I command!" shrieked the Chamberlain. "Change my necktie! Grey swallow-tail coat! The riband is not right!"

"Because you stoop, my lord."

"I stoop? Then support me! You do not take any care of me! Where is my snuff-box?"

"In the pocket of the coat."

"H'm! . . . how he answers! You do not like my being dressed! You wish me to wear all day long my dressing-gown and slippers!"

"Certainly, sir, for it tires you to dress."

"What a solicitude!"

"There is not a soul, and you dress every morning as if for a Court reception."

The Chamberlain looked threateningly with his glassy eyes at the servant.

"Listen, if you grow old, and have not yet any common sense, then be silent!"

Baptiste shrugged his shoulders triflingly. The Chamberlain snorted, leaned on his walking-stick that was handed to him, and, having come to a big mirror, began to look at himself.

The inspection was a long one, full of impatient movements and deep sighing.

Well, four long years had passed since the Chamberlain had put on his gala dress, being satisfied even on the most solemn

days with the amplest, warmest, and the most comfortable coats. And then, after those four years, he had noticed that he was different, that he was less elegant. He could neither assume that lordly mien of which he had been proud, nor could he smile in a courtly manner, nor move with a stride and without a walking-stick! If he could only conquer that rattling of the jaws!

The Chamberlain sighed heavily, and became sad.

Only yesterday he thought that Baptiste's experience would suffice to make him young again, and to give a lesson to any youngster how to bend, walk, bow, how to wear the riband, and to remind the world what elegant people surrounded the late king.

To-day, however, although he wore a new wig, although Baptiste did not spare powder and paint, although he buttoned him up tightly, it was not the same as four years ago, when he was complimented at the Emperor's receptions.

But perhaps it was Baptiste's fault; perhaps he had neglected his art.

That thought made the Chamberlain turn and look more attentively at his valet. The Chamberlain's look rested suddenly on Baptiste's head.

"Well!" muttered the Chamberlain with astonishment. "But you have grown old! . . ."

Baptiste smiled.

"A long time ago, sir."

"I did not notice. How old are you?"

"Fifty-two, my lord."

"Phi! Fifty-two! You are older than Pan Ksawery! H'm! and I am . . ."

"Eighty . . ."

"It is none of your business how old I am!" the Chamberlain interrupted energetically. "You have grown old! . . . Ho! . . . ho! You have grown old!"

"We all grow old."

The Chamberlain snorted angrily.

"All! Phi! phi! Not every one in the same way. Well, to be sure! I am not younger, either! But you . . . you . . . have become old! I tell you you are grey!"

Baptiste did not answer. As for the Chamberlain, he took his snuff-box, opened it with a noise, took a good pinch, then snapped his fingers, and concluded with contentment—

"You have grown awfully old!"

"Shall I call the lackey, sir?"

"What for?"

"I thought your lordship would go to the park."

"But I do not need any assistance! Give me my hat, and conduct me downstairs."

The valet drew nearer. The Chamberlain glanced once more into the mirror, and said impatiently—

"Wait! I have not the Legion! Where is the Legion?"

"The Legion of Honour!"

"Why are you staring at me? I am asking you where is my Legion of Honour?"

"In a box; but my lord . . ."

"Give it to me! Be quick, I have no time!"

Baptiste did as he was ordered.

"The riband is crumpled, even torn a little . . ." said the valet.

"It is your fault! You do not take care of it. . . ."

"Because yourself, my lord . . ."

"Do not excuse yourself! Put it under the coat. On the White Eagle!"

"H'm! . . . very well. But perhaps it would be proper to put on the Court dress?"

The valet was frightened at the thought that his master would order him to dress him again.

"Court dress to-day? Here in Walewice?"

The Chamberlain moved his head with commiseration.

"You have grown old, and you do not remember the simplest etiquette."

"Well, here . . ."

"You are stupid," whispered the Chamberlain with a mysterious smile. "It is lovely weather. Understand! H'm! . . . therefore I may meet some one in the park, and then it is proper for a host to do the honours. It is my duty to hope that His Imperial Highness would like to breathe the fresh air . . ."

"His Imperial Highness!" Baptiste repeated with astonishment.

The Chamberlain rapped angrily with his stick.

"Enough of it! You are stupid! You have no idea! Call me a lackey! Quickly! He will conduct me. I do not need your help. You have become grey, and have grown stupid!"

The valet set his teeth and called a lackey. When the latter entered the Chamberlain nodded to him to come nearer, leaned on his shoulder, and went towards the door leading to the park.

"Conduct me behind the castle, where the statues are," ordered the Chamberlain.

The lackey took the direction he was told.

When the fresh air touched the Chamberlain and the sun began to warm him, he grew joyful.

"Phi! The hawthorn is blooming already!"

"Yes, my lord!"

"And the lilacs also!"

"Summer is early this year, my lord."

"Yes, yes! Wait! I cannot see. Is John over there, under the linden-trees?"

"He is, my lord."

"Then conduct me to him," said the Chamberlain, trying to make long steps, but in the meanwhile leaning more heavily on the lackey's arm.

The lackey brought his master to a bench on which the old gamekeeper, John, was leaning under some aged linden-trees.

The Chamberlain nodded to old John, who took off his cap respectfully, sat on the bench and breathed.

"Stand there," he ordered the lackey, and when the latter retreated several steps respectfully, the Chamberlain turned to John and asked: "Well, how goes it?"

"Everything right, my lord. He will soon be here. They were dressing him."

"Then you say he will come out to-day?"

"He may be here at any moment. . . . Andrew's wife was dressed as if for church."

The Chamberlain cleared his throat and rapped on his snuff-box.

"Have you swept the alleys of the park?"

"Yes, my lord, there is not one large pebble underfoot!"

"If she is only careful, and does not stumble."

John laughed.

"Andrew's wife? Where she puts her feet there are marks as if some one had driven posts into the ground. . . ."

"So!" wondered the Chamberlain, taking a sincere interest in what John was telling him. "Andrew's wife! I did not imagine! Where does she come from?"

"From Bielaw; she is my first cousin."

"H'm! h'm! I did not expect. How did you say? As if posts were driven. We cannot do it any more. But I must tell you that Baptiste has grown old. Then Andrew's wife. H'm! Tell Andrew to come . . . perhaps a span of horses. . . .?"

"It will help them, my lord; they are not very rich."

"Well, a few cows. H'm! it is so. And . . . how are the others? . . ."

"The others, my lord?" answered the old servant questioningly, not knowing what to answer.

"Yes, the others!" said the Chamberlain hesitatingly, looking at his snuff-box. "Well, apparently nothing . . . the one who was ill is well now. . . ."

"Everything is right, my lord; her ladyship looks like a rose, and all fear is over."

The Chamberlain looked closer at his snuff-box.

"If I do not say it in a bad hour, she is health itself now. Last night she went beyond the park, across the field to the birch grove; I could hardly keep up with her."

"In the evening, cold lies in wait in the dew."

"If one is in good health . . ."

The Chamberlain made an impatient movement.

"I said it lies in wait; cold, pain. In the dew. . . ."

John was abashed at such a passionate outburst; in the meanwhile the Chamberlain further enlarged upon ailments lurking in the dusk. The reasoning was so long that it tired the Chamberlain himself and made him sleepy.

"My lord, they are coming!" John said suddenly.

The Chamberlain shivered, and seized a walking-stick.

"Where? Who?"

"Andrew's wife with the chambermaid, and . . ."

"His Imperial Highness," finished the Chamberlain feverishly.

John raised his bushy eyebrows, but having understood, affirmed enthusiastically: "Yes, my lord; Andrew's wife is carrying our Imperial Highness."

The Chamberlain began to move hastily.

"John, give me your arm, or no, you," said he to the lackey. "Come here, help me! John, wait! We will go round and meet them as if by chance . . . at the turning of the alley. Let us be going. Look if the riband of the Legion of Honour is all right! Take hold of my left arm!"

The Chamberlain, propped up on both sides, went on striding into the alley that turned in the direction taken by the chambermaid and the nurse with the infant in her arms. The manœuvre was well calculated, for after a few steps the women were opposite the Chamberlain. The distance diminished rapidly.

The Chamberlain glanced forward, stopped suddenly, wiped the perspiration from his forehead, fixed his head, and whispered something to John.

"Introduce me."

"Introduce?"

"Introduce me to his Imperial Highness, you blockhead, introduce me *pleno titulo!*"

John became scarlet, advanced towards the nurse, took off his cap, and, looking fiercely at the infant's tiny face coming out from the white cap, shouted solemnly: "His lordship Anastazy Colonna Walewski, Chamberlain of the Court of his Majesty the King, Chevalier of the Orders of the White Eagle and the Legion of Honour!"

The nurse and the maid became abashed.

As for the Chamberlain, he came nearer to the child and bowed with his hat.

"I am very much obliged for the honour. I have long wished for that favour. The privilege your Imperial . . ."

Here the Chamberlain stopped suddenly, frightened at the infant's screaming; the nurse tried to tranquillise it.

The Chamberlain bowed awkwardly and withdrew.

"Such a tiny creature, my lord," said John, noticing the

Chamberlain's emotion. "It does not know it lives; how could it understand? . . ."

The Chamberlain ground his teeth and looked crushingly at the old servant.

"You do not understand. Apparently you have seen many things, but you have not learned anything. Understand! Why should he understand? Respect to the imperial blood must be shown. And it seems to you that one should act as . . . as . . . with any little shrimp! Perhaps it seems so to all of you? Wait! I shall show you . . . respect! Bow at five steps. Retreat! I shall give you lessons! To the four winds! Stupid! Baptiste has grown old, become grey and stupid, and you too. . . Suppose some one hears? *Horrendum! Crimen læsæ majestatis!*"

Here the Chamberlain wiped the perspiration, and having made an energetic movement with his stick, seized the lackey's arm and turned to the castle.

This incident impressed John and disturbed the women, who had received the strictest orders to choose the solitary alleys in the park and to avoid any meeting with inhabitants of the castle. But as it seems this incident made the greatest impression on a witness, hidden behind the hangings of a window on the first floor of the castle.

That witness was Pani Walewska, who having told the women which alley they should follow with her son so that she might see him from her window, and having purposely chosen an early hour so as not to disturb her ex-husband's afternoon walk, had experienced an unexpected shock. That shock was like a thunderbolt, upsetting all her ideas about her former husband, about his behaviour, about the present situation, about his egotism and childishness.

Pani Walewska had lived here since the previous autumn, a not over-pleasant life. At Schoenbrunn, where she had lived in quiet happiness during a mild October, near the Emperor, whom she worshipped, where, in the modest house, she was hiding her longings and sorrows and the apprehensions of coming maternity, the order of the Marshal of the Court had fallen on her.

She could hardly believe. But it was so. It was a laconic,

stiff, merciless, precise order, not leaving any doubt that they had a right to command even her. Together with the order a scandalous gossip reached her, uniting her name with Gorayski's in a knot of base intrigue.

At the first outburst of the wrong the Chamberlain's wife went to the Emperor's headquarters in Schoenbrunn Castle, but they did not allow her to see the Emperor, and pressed her to obey the command. And that command was doubly merciless, painful, humiliating. Not only did it separate her from the Emperor, not only did it chase her away, not only did it pierce her heart, but it also crushed her dignity, her pride, for it required her immediately to go to Walewice, and to be under the roof of her divorced husband.

In vain Pani Walewska resisted, in vain she wished to avoid at least that humiliation . . . they sympathised with her, they showed her hearty commiseration, they promised to speak in her favour, but in the meanwhile they told her distinctly that the command must be executed before all. And notwithstanding the strain of her will, protests, desperate threats, Pani Walewska found herself under her ex-husband's roof in Walewice.

Here, her former apartments were given to her. They surrounded her with the care of servants unknown to her, and tried to persuade her that although the Emperor was very much afflicted, he cared immensely about the Chamberlain's ex-wife's health, and would not forget her. . . .

Pani Walewska was so crushed, so frightened and so disenchanted, that she became apathetic.

Months passed away. Pani Walewska did not even try to think about the future, about to-morrow. A crushing thought, obstinately the same, tore her mind, rent her heart. And that thought was about the fact that she had allowed herself to be carried away by passion, that she had not had strength to resist persuasions, that she had broken the most sacred oath, that she had brought shame upon her husband, under whose roof she now found a shelter, while there they had chased her away brutally, they had calumniated her, they had repudiated her.

Months passed away—awfully long, monotonous, like her grief that could not be quenched.

Pani Walewska did not leave her apartments even for one moment, neither did she listen to Princess Jablonowska's reasoning, or heed her chambermaid's whispers, telling her that Duroc had sent a special courier asking after Pani Walewska's health, and hinting adroitly that the inquiry was not made by Duroc alone. What did she care about that kindness, about proofs that she was not forgotten, while below her apartment there lived an infirm old man, crushed perhaps by her levity, despising the unfaithful ex-wife, sneering that that great hero, that lord of kingdoms, who was so powerful and had riches at his disposal, did not give her even a piece of bread, a roof under which she could hide her sad lot without being obliged for anything to her divorced husband.

Months passed away, till from that apathy, from that stupor, Pani Walewska was waked up by the crying of a child, a son, who having come into the world with May, filled her heart with new warmth, with new life. And Pani Walewska's soul was melted; she cared for the child alone, she rejoiced by it, she was happy through it.

It is true that new apprehensions and cares swarmed in her head, but although they tormented her, they did not make her apathetic any more; on the contrary, they gave her strength for a struggle, and she determined to conquer impediments and difficulties.

Pani Walewska was soon well, and she doubled her cares about her situation. Apparently it was not changed—for as formerly she had led a solitary life—but in the meanwhile the servants surrounding her became more and more respectful and humble.

Pani Walewska endeavoured to use her ascendency to learn some details concerning herself, but those details were scarce, for the servants were passive tools in some one's hands.

The French housekeeper could only tell her that the Marshal of the Court was sending couriers every day, and that the day the child was born five ordinances were sent into the world with the news; further, that the Marshal announced a change as soon impending, but that she did not wish for it, for she was attached to Pani Walewska with her whole heart. On the other hand, the Polish servants, especially old John, had also a

little news, and this was that the Chamberlain, only once a day, in the afternoon, would leave his room for a walk in the park, that Baptiste administered the whole estate, and that the latter liked to know what was going on in Pani Walewska's apartment.

All this news did not make any impression on Pani Walewska; still less could she learn when she asked what was going on in Warsaw. Since the Chamberlain's return to Walewice, in 1807, he had not subscribed to a paper, the neighbours did not visit the castle, probably estranged because the Chamberlain was not well, and did not receive anybody. The only sources of news were Jewish merchants from Bielava and Sobota, and through them some news came to Pani Walewska about festivities in Warsaw, about the sojourn of the new Polish king, that the Austrian Emperor had been obliged to give his daughter as a wife to Napoleon, that the Pope was imprisoned, that the Polish army had come back, and that Prince Joseph was going to marry some young girl who, disguised as a private, had served in the army; that the Speaker Malachowski had died, and while dying had cursed Napoleon so awfully that Wybicki had besought him to withdraw his curse, but that the Speaker had died without doing so; that the Napoleonic law had been introduced, and, according to it, even a nobleman could be fined or imprisoned; that they were going to recruit again, although the Diet did not wish it, but Davoust ordered it, and it must be so, for Davoust could not stand any opposition to his wishes.

Those disorderly pieces of news, ornamented with various remarks from the gossipers, could not satisfy Pani Walewska, who was accustomed to stand at the great altar and look at the whole chessboard of history and events.

The result was that those pieces of news, instead of satisfying her, aroused in her the desire to learn something more precise. Several times she wished to write to Warsaw to Princess Jablonowska or to Mme. de Vauban, but she gave up the idea and waited.

Such was the state of affairs on the day when Pani Walewska had sent her son with the nurse and chambermaid for the first walk in the park. She would have given much if she could also have gone into the shady alleys of the park, trodden the well-

known paths, and breathed the balmy air of the spring. Pride, and then the fear of meeting her ex-husband's servants, obliged her to stop in her apartments. Yielding to that voluntary restraint, Pani Walewska had determined to accompany her son at least with her looks from behind the window hangings. Therefore she sat at the window and looked with love to the spot where the child's white cap was seen. All at once she perceived her ex-husband coming out from under a shadowy tree and going directly towards the child.

At that sight Pani Walewska wished to shout and warn the nurse to turn the other way, but it was too late.

And Pani Walewska beheld her ex-husband's thin figure hanging on the arms of two servants; she beheld his white, plaster-like face, and saw the Chamberlain come to her child; how he bowed; she even heard some sounds of his voice.

At the first moment Pani Walewska thought that her husband was sneering at her child, that not being able to reach the mother he was avenging himself on her child, that he was insulting it—giving vent to his anger. But having attentively looked at the Chamberlain's humbly bent figure, at his solemn movements, and at his gala dress, Pani Walewska unconsciously felt gratitude towards her ex-husband. She knew him too well not to be able to see, even from a distance, that in his strange behaviour there was no maliciousness and anger.

The nurse and the maid dispersed Pani Walewska's doubts. Tears appeared in her eyes. She forgot all the grievances she had against the Chamberlain; she had forgiven him all; only her own fault seemed bigger, only she became humble, and a desire to go down to the Chamberlain's apartment and thank him seized her.

And thinking in that way she did not dare to suppose that, after that act of duty, her life would change under the roof of her ex-husband. Never! The marriage had been made invalid—the bridges were burnt—even should she be obliged to live in misery, she must leave, she must go away, she would take nothing from him. When, after the meeting in the park, Pani Walewska was pressing her son to her bosom, thinking again about her past, the housekeeper announced Mme. de Vauban's arrival to her.

Pani Walewska would not believe it at first, but being solemnly assured by the woman, she rushed into the boudoir and fell into the Countess's arms.

Mme. de Vauban was moved by that unexpected outburst of cordiality on Pani Walewska's part, for she did not understand that the latter welcomed her because she expected Mme. de Vauban to be able to disperse all her conjectures, and perchance to help her to put a stop to her unbearable position.

After a noisy greeting on Mme. de Vauban's part, and after numerous exaggerated compliments from her, "how much more beautiful *chère Marie* had become," about the marvellous beauty of the child, about her longing for "her best friend," the conversation became evener, quieter.

Precisely speaking, it was not a conversation, but the Countess's long monologue, sometimes interrupted by Pani Walewska's questions.

Mme. de Vauban spoke at length and picturesquely, smiling at her listener's signs of astonishment. Pani Walewska learned then about the peace concluded with Austria, about the probable divorce of Anetka Tyszkiewicz from her husband, about the projected marriage between Victor Ossolinski and Zosia Chodkiewicz, Princess Jablonowska's niece, about the Pope's sojourn in Saronne, about Czosonowska, who sent a thousand kisses to Pani Walewska, about the continual quarrels between Davoust and Prince Poniatowski.

All this news Mme. de Vauban ornamented with artful remarks, mixed with irony and sometimes with malice.

Pani Walewska listened patiently, waiting till the Countess would touch on the subject that was most interesting to her; but when Mme. de Vauban dwelt still further upon things indifferent to the Chamberlain's ex-wife, she interrupted her suddenly—

"And where is the Emperor?"

"The Emperor! In Paris, my dear child! He is tired, as it seems! I pity him heartily. What a bother he was obliged to undergo on account of that marriage. Josephine made scenes! I pity her, too! But one must be indulgent—I have a right to know something about it. . . . But you have grown pale, my dearest . . . !"

"I thought it was only gossip!"

"He was obliged! I tell you he was obliged! It is a political marriage! There is the question of the dynasty . . . of a successor! They forced him!"

Pani Walewska dropped her eyes, and stared at the carpet.

"You know very well that my social position, the tradition of my family splendour, makes me a partisan of the Bourbons; but notwithstanding that, I feel for him a hearty commiseration, *il est si brave!* They imposed an Austrian on him. As it seems, *elle n'est pas trop bien.* Josephine got a large fortune, and they left her a title. Truly, I do not understand, for she should long ago have lost all her illusions. . . . Not everybody is as strong! But you, dearest, you have no reason to complain of that . . .!"

"It seems that all this is perfectly indifferent to-day."

"You are mistaken; they always highly appreciate your opinion, every one of your words."

Pani Walewska laughed bitterly.

"Then you must know that I am in disgrace. Either I became importunate to him, or permitted another to conquer my position. . . ."

Mme. de Vauban closed Pani Walewska's mouth with a kiss.

"Enough, enough! Not one word more! Fatality, that is all, and if you wish, malice, jealousy, human iniquity! They circumvented him, deceived him, and you must agree they had such proofs, such appearances of your being guilty . . ."

"Of having visited a dying playmate of my childhood. . . ."

"Chevalier de Gorayski! I was moved by the news of his death. But what would you say if I tell you that I, your devoted friend, who knew your immaculate heart, I thought that you were a little bit fond of Gorayski. . . . And even that you loved him. . . ."

"I did love him like a brother. . . ."

"I believe you! But is there a man who would believe this? Only think! Ever since that adventure with Herceau—he has a nasty scar on his face—they watched Gorayski. . . . They spied on you, and saw you with officers on horseback at night. Well, notwithstanding all, it is a Court, although it smells of barracks, but it is a Court! And he suffered so much. . . ."

"And found me guilty without listening to my justification."

"You must see in that the cleverness of the intrigue."

"It is done," said Pani Walewska drily.

"Yes, but the truth is bound to come out. Do not think, my dear child, that those who loved you have abandoned you, that they have forgotten you. Time was necessary for the elucidation, and it came. . . ."

"I do not understand," whispered Pani Walewska, dominating her emotion with an effort.

"The Emperor expects your return to Paris."

Pani Walewska lifted her head proudly.

"I do not intend to go there at all."

Mme. de Vauban grew sorrowful.

"You do not understand me; my sudden arrival here is not without reason. It is simply this: knowing my friendship for you, and your reciprocal sentiment towards me, they besought me; they made me promise that . . . well . . . bring you to Paris, where longing . . ."

Pani Walewska rushed from her seat.

"Countess, you must give up your plans, then. I permitted myself to be brought from Schoenbrunn here, where I live on the generosity of my ex-husband, but there is no power which could make me move without my will. I shall defend myself."

Mme. de Vauban grew confused, and began to manœuvre in order to save the situation.

"Dearest! What ideas! Would I dare! I came here pushed by my heart, for the sake of friendship!"

"Such being the case, stop your further arguments!"

"Only one word more!"

"Very well."

"You are the mother of his son!" whispered Mme. Vauban with emphasis.

"But I have also a right to have my dignity and to be my own mistress."

"Undoubtedly, but you have no right to trifle with the child's career; he also has a right to be considered."

Pani Walewska crushed her hands.

"Finish, finish quickly!"

"Only be quieted, and think it over. There is the question

of the future. Judge for yourself. You are divorced, you have no right to your ex-husband's name. Excuse me for going into such details. What name will you give to your son? Have you a right to refuse him his father's care? Have you a right to forbid the father to see his child, after whom his heart is longing?"

Pani Walewska covered her face with her hands and was silent, while Mme. de Vauban defended her position enthusiastically.

"You can bear ill-will, you cannot love any more, you can say that you have lost all illusions, that you have fallen from the heaven of dreams on the earth of disenchantment, but you cannot deny the tie uniting you. And this tie is the son, is the future of that son—his career. I do not deny that the Emperor hopes you will return his feelings—that you will forgive him a moment of jealousy—that you will take into consideration his own sufferings; but all this depends on your point of view. All he would like to do is to assure his son a position in the world. Such is the state of affairs. My dearest, I did not think for a minute that you would give in at my first prayer, that you would forgive at once . . . but the son . . . the son!"

Pani Walewska looked feverishly around her, and went to her bedroom. There she knelt at the child's cradle and cried.

Mme. de Vauban, having looked discreetly at Pani Walewska, smiled with satisfaction, and having exchanged a few words with the housekeeper, ordered herself to be announced to the Chamberlain.

A week after Mme. Vauban's visit to Walewice, a large blue carriage, with six powerful bay horses harnessed to it, stood at the portico of the castle.

Two vans were behind the carriage.

A feverish animation reigned round the vehicles. The servants were bringing out trunks, boxes, baskets, bundles, and casks.

The apartment on the first floor was full of noise, of mixed voices, of maids and lackeys rushing about commanded by John. On the ground floor a grave-like quiet was supreme.

Notwithstanding that, even in that part of the Walewski residence there had been some participation in the cares about the preparations, only in a different way.

The Chamberlain himself, dressed since early morning in a brown coat, with the star of the White Eagle and the cross of the Legion of Honour on his chest, was sitting at the window and watched the preparations from behind its hangings, from time to time sharing his thoughts with Baptiste, and even giving him some orders.

"Tell Matthew to drive carefully."

"An old coachman, sir."

"That makes no difference. Has he taken everything he ought to? Such a long journey! An accident is inevitable."

"I am sure he has everything he needs," muttered the valet.

"Very well! Baptiste, send a lackey to the housekeeper and tell her to take good care of the provisions! They will be on the road ten days or a fortnight. Above all, they must not forget medicine."

"The housekeeper will not obey a lackey if she does not know who orders. I must tell her it is your lordship."

"No! You must not do that! But do it just the same. Look! they do not know how to load the boxes."

The time passed quickly so, that the Chamberlain hardly noticed that the vans were ready.

Pan Walewski was so absorbed by his observations that he did not feel that some one was tugging at his sleeve; only when he heard John's voice he turned his head from the window.

"What is it?"

"I came to make my bow to your lordship."

"What?"

"We are going, my lord."

"You are going! How is it? But is nobody there yet?"

"They are coming down."

"Coming down!" repeated the Chamberlain in a hoarse voice. "H'm! Then you also! And the Emperor's courier?"

"He will sit on the box with the coachman."

"Ah! with the coachman," repeated the Chamberlain. "And Andrew's wife? Wait! Come here! Help me! Here is a purse; give it to Andrew's wife. Tell her . . . well . . . tell her . . . that . . . that it is from you."

"She would not believe it, your lordship."

"No matter! Wait! Here is a box! Take good care of it. . . . Should there be any need of diamonds . . or . . . understand? Then in this box . . . are . . ."

John's eyes became moist.

The Chamberlain, in the meanwhile, holding by the arm of the old servant, spoke further.

"Not now, but when it may be necessary. As if it were from you . . . the necklace. . . . Wait! . . . here is for you . . . go—with God!"

"Your lordship!" moaned John, falling at the Chamberlain's feet.

"Nothing . . . well! With God!"

John put the purse into a pocket, took the heavy box, bowed, and went out.

The Chamberlain minced to the window again, but as soon as he glanced through it he trembled, and cried passionately to Baptiste—

"My stick! Hat! Give me your arm! Lively!"

Pani Walewska, sitting in the carriage, looked at the castle. Beside her, Andrew's wife was holding in her arms the child. The chambermaid was ready to get in.

Pani Walewska was oppressed. She had lived so many long and sad days in this castle! And she was going perhaps to meet with worse ones. She was going, not having said one word to the man under whose roof she had found shelter, whose wife she formerly was, whose last days she had made bitter. . . . It is done . . . bashfulness, and fear that she might be insulted, took her courage away. . . . She wished, but postponed. . . . She was going, and the consciousness of that departure, at the moment when death was hovering over that old man, would follow her, would pursue her. . . . It was done!

Pani Walewska breathed deeply, dominated her emotion, and was looking through the window of the carriage in order to tell John to hasten the departure, when the Chamberlain's wrinkled face appeared.

At that sight Pani Walewska paled and threw herself back.

The Chamberlain, not paying any heed to her fright, waved his hand to the infant and whispered some words.

"In the name of the Father, of the Son . . ." muttered the Chamberlain, and stopped.

Pani Walewska could hardly breathe. She turned her eyes on her ex-husband and put out her hand.

The Chamberlain trembled and stood bent, leaning with both hands on his walking-stick.

"Forgive me!" muttered Pani Walewska with an effort.

The Chamberlain looked at her with his pale, sad eyes, took her hand, and pressed it to his lips.

"No, no! I am not worthy!" whispered Pani Walewska.

"Well," mumbled the Chamberlain. "Well . . . it is . . . and if . . . then bring me his Imperial Highness! Yes, bring me . . . In the name of the Father and of the Son. . . ."

Pani Walewska wished to answer, but she could not find words, her strength gave way. . . . She saw the Chamberlain's white wig bend before her. She understood what he had said to her, and she noticed when a big tear rolled on his withered face, but she could only, by a nervous pressure of his hand, make him know that her soul was with him, that she humiliated herself.

CHAPTER XVIII

WHEN, on March 20th, 1811, the first cannon-shot at the Hotel des Invalides was fired in Paris, the inhabitants of the capital of France trembled, stopped their conversation, and began to count the shots. . . .

The emotion was great and general, as if Paris of those times had not been for long years the centre from which war cries sounded throughout the world, from which vast armies poured and overthrew thrones, destroyed kingdoms, tore away the boundaries of states, decided the lot of nations.

"One, two, three, four!" counted Paris with apprehension, for the number of shots was going to decide whether its future was to be quiet or disturbed.

"Ten, eleven, twelve!" repeated the inhabitants of the palaces in the Faubourg St. Germain, as well as of the modest dwelling-houses in Montmartre.

The official announcement of Mary Louise's confinement was short; if the newborn babe were a son, not twenty-one, but a hundred and one cannon-shots would be fired.

"Seventeen, eighteen, nineteen!" counted Paris, with increasing emotion.

Eastern Europe had given up the desire of fighting Napoleon any more; Spain was going to lay down its arms at any moment; England, ruined by the custom-house blockade, was waiting for an opportunity to stretch out her hand for reconciliation—there would be a glorious peace for France. But in order that this peace should be durable France needed an heir, for only in that case would her lot cease to depend on a ball, on a piece of shell, or on the thrust of a criminal hand, for only then there would be an answer to the question: What would happen should Napoleon be at hand no longer?

"Twenty, twenty-one!" whispered Bonaparte's followers, and their hearts stopped beating. And that moment between the last and the following cannon-shot made the hopes of revolutionists waiting for disorder more sure, while the men who had grown up under Napoleon's eagles became gloomy. That moment quenched in some people all joy, and kindled it in others. To the capital that moment was torture, grief, doubt, prayer, and curse. It made the people think over the past and look into the future.

Suddenly the cannon roared louder, longer. . . .

"Twenty-two!" shouted hundreds of thousands, and Paris trembled.

Crowds of people rushed into streets and squares, crowds avid for news, united in one shout, in one song.

The cannons continued firing on the shores of the Seine, but the Parisians did not need to count any longer, the twenty-second shot told them everything.

The crowds increased like an enormous grey wave, and rushed to the Tuileries in order to greet the future ruler, king of kings, emperor.

While the streets round the Tuileries were packed with people and resounded with joyful shouts, the other streets grew quieter, emptier. Among those, perhaps the quietest at that moment was the Rue de la Victoire, although here also there was some animation, especially in a small but elegant mansion, marked with the number 48.

The direct cause of the movement was an elderly lady, who, at the moment the cannons began to fire, alighted from a carriage in front of the mansion. That lady was so much moved by the cannonading that, notwithstanding her advanced age, she cried: "They are firing!" and rushed to the stairs and then to the vestibule, arousing a surprise in her coachman and in the servants of the little palace.

In the ante-chamber, without taking off her cloak, she rushed to the old, bent servant wearing the imperial livery.

"Where is Pani Walewska?" asked the lady in Polish.

"Shall I announce?"

"No! Take me! Three! . . . four! . . ."

The old man did not budge.

"I must announce you. Your grace knows . . ."

"No! They are firing! Eight, nine!"

"Such are my orders! I am going to announce!"

The lackey disappeared at the turn of the hall, while the lady rushed into the drawing-room to the right, calling and counting by turns.

"Suzanne! Eighteen!"

"Your grace!"

"Ah! Twenty! Help me to take off my cloak! Lord! Twenty-one! Hasten! Twenty-two! I am fainting! Salts! Or no! Wait . . . I may be mistaken! They are still firing!"

The Princess fell on the sofa. The maid did not pay any attention to the lady's emotion, and was taking care of the cloak. The lady, with half-closed eyes, listened to the booming of cannons, and whispered to herself, evidently unable to control the imperative need of expressing her thoughts.

"It is done! All is lost! My bad presentiments are realised! Until now he endured her as the mother of his son! Talleyrand warned her! She did not know how to take advantage, she did not assure her future! If now, at the decisive moment, she will not dictate her demands—but no, I cannot permit this! . . . A family has its rights, its claims! Suzanne! Give me some water! They are still firing?"

"Yes, your grace."

"Were there any callers to-day?"

"No, your grace. Only some flowers were brought."

"Flowers!" repeated the Princess, with an outburst. "They make one dizzy!"

"Her ladyship is very fond of them."

"Enough! It is no concern of yours! She is fond of flowers! And . . . naturally the Prince of Friul did not call?"

"No, your grace."

"Of course! And how is the Count?"

"I don't know. I have not seen the nurse this morning."

Her ladyship is waiting for your grace in the blue drawing-room!" resounded a lackey's voice.

The Princess smiled ironically.

"She is waiting! Much obliged!" she said through her set teeth, rising slowly from the sofa; but suddenly, prompted by

a thought, she went quickly to the other side of the mansion, and rushed into the drawing-room in which Pani Walewska was sitting with her son on her knees.

"Mary, my dearest!" began the Princess in her trembling voice, "I wished so much to be with you at this moment. Permit me to kiss you . . . and this poor boy also! Ah, how sweet he is to-day! He laughs! Poor child, he does not know anything! But you must not give in. Courage, my dear child! If you only trust me! One might have expected this. You have no idea how deeply I feel! But I am with you . . . I . . . I . . .!"

"I am much obliged," said Pani Walewska quietly, looking at her son's fair head, "although I do not understand your commiseration. Alexandre is quite well."

The Princess lifted her painted eyebrows.

"Then you have not heard cannon-shots? Do you not hear them? Listen! a hundred and one! . . ."

"Yes, I did notice."

"The Emperor has a successor."

Pani Walewska bent over her son's head.

"And you receive this news so indifferently?"

An imperceptible blush passed across Pani Walewska's face.

"Princess, you are mistaken—not indifferently, I am very glad! The Emperor wished so much to have a legitimate son!"

The Princess cried in despair.

"*Par exemple! C'est incomprehensible! Inexplicable!* Then you cannot comprehend the situation if you are not excited at the thought of what will become of your child!"

"My child?"

"Well, it is clear. Until now it had a great, undeniable influence. It united you with the Emperor, it assured your position, it permitted one to hope for the most splendid future. Simply, my dear, even Mary Louise was obliged to count with you. Do not say no! The best proof was the Empress Josephine. If it had not been for Alexandre, would she have cared so much for your friendship? To-day you are the vanquished. The Emperor will not be longing any more for Alexandre, for he has another son. . . . Even, in some respects, Alexandre will be

an obstacle to him. Yes, my dearest . . . now is the time to ask for something, not to forget anything, for to-morrow you will not be allowed to ask for anything."

"But neither to-day nor to-morrow am I going to ask for anything."

Princess Jablonowska made an angry movement.

"Mary, think it over. Remember your child. You must not decide not to ask for anything, not to make your conditions."

"What conditions?"

"Well . . . of your withdrawing."

Pani Walewska lifted her big blue eyes to the Princess.

"Yes, yes," affirmed the Princess emphatically. "You have a right. It is your duty. Above all you must get a title. Alexandre was made a count, but that is not enough. You must ask for the Principality of Lowicz. They can take it from Davoust and give him something else. . . . I must insist!"

"Princess, you trouble yourself uselessly."

"Ah, if you have no confidence in me, if you do not care for your son's future . . ."

"I understand it quite differently."

"As you like. I wash my hands. I am awfully sorry you are imprudent, that you forget that that little estate of yours would not suffice for you all, for there is your brother Paul, and your sister Pani Rychlowska. I do not know how I could convince you, for I know that my attachment to you does not carry any weight." Here the Princess put her handkerchief to her eyes. "It is so painful, so painful!"

"If you would leave that matter alone it would be best for both of us. Pray, remember that I yield where I can. Recollect M. de Flahaut's affair."

"It was Anetka Tyszkiewicz's *faiblesse*."

"But you wished me to intercede. . . . Then remember the Lubienskis. . . ."

"I did not expect you to make me any reproaches."

"I do not reproach; I only wish to prove to you that I do what you wish me to do when the question is not about myself. Here I decide alone. Let me not speak any more about this."

"Very well."

"Have you been out?"

"Yes, I went to Leroy; he is making twenty new dresses for the Empress."

"I am sure they will be pretty."

"Undoubtedly," answered the Princess drily. "Are you not going out to-day?"

"Where could I go?"

"Of course, with your way of living. As for me, I am going to dress."

"Do you intend to make calls?"

"I must go to the Tuileries to present my congratulations at least to the Princess Montebello."

"Then, this evening . . . ?"

"If your servants will allow . . . ?"

Pani Walewska smiled sadly.

"You know very well that those orders are not mine. Duroc asked for him. . . . And then I need so often to be alone. . . ."

The Princess kissed Pani Walewska noisily, touched little Alexandre's face, and went out.

Pani Walewska remained motionless, thoughtful, looking into the grey space of a March day. Suddenly, the corners of her shapely mouth quivered, the bosom heaved with quiet pain that ended in a spasmodic sigh; tears fell on the child's fair head.

The nursery governess entered the drawing-room and began to relate the latest news that had already reached the Rue de la Victoire.

The Empress had been ill since the day before, but everything was only over towards morning.

The Emperor spent the whole night in the Empress's room. Corvisart and Dubois did not leave her for one minute.

Pani Walewska made a movement; the child woke up.

The governess rang for the nurse, and when Pani Walewska handed her the child the governess gave vent to her talkativeness.

"The whole Court was up. A battalion of grenadiers watched all the doors; nobody was permitted to go out. Mme. de Montesquiou was appointed governess of the children of France. A fine position, to have charge of the heir to the throne! Not everyone is as lucky as Mme. de Montesquiou."

"Where have you all this news from?" interrupted Pani Walewska, displeased. "You know I do not like street gossip."

"But it is not gossip! The whole of Paris is talking about it. In the morning the whole Imperial family was called to the Tuileries, as well as all the officials of the Court—Marshals, Generals, Ministers, and Ambassadors. The secret was so well kept that they did not know why they were called. . . . Then the Emperor himself brought in his son. . . . They say he had tears in his eyes. . . . To-morrow there is to be a gala, festivities, solemn prayers, a banquet for the army! The Tuileries are surrounded by thousands of people. The whole town is rushing to congratulate His Majesty!"

"The whole town! Ah! I am glad you told me all this! Pray bring me my jewellery-box, writing-paper, pen and ink."

"Some one to take a letter?"

"John, as usual."

The governess did as she was told. Pani Walewska wrote a letter. It was a short one:—

"I am happy in your happiness. Little Alexandre sends a kiss to his future Emperor.—Mary."

Having written this letter, Pani Walewska opened the jewel-box and took out a gold ring with a sphynx's head engraved on it; inside the ring one could read the following words: "*Quand tu cessera de m'aimer, n'oublie pas que je t'aime.*"

She wrapped the ring in the letter, sealed it, and ordered John to be called to her.

"To the palace?" asked the old servant confidentially.

"Yes. You will give it to Constant personally."

"I understand!"

"Only I wonder if they will let you in? . . ."

The old man glanced at the Court livery he wore.

"In this green they would let me in to Lucifer himself. A very strong colour! Sometimes a big officer might be turned out from the Tuileries, but nobody touches me!"

John was going to say more about the privileges he enjoyed, but having glanced at his mistress, he became suddenly silent, and withdrew on tiptoe.

The dusk came. Pani Walewska in her quiet boudoir was

sitting at the spinet, bringing out sad melodies from it. It seemed that in the strings of the instrument she was seeking for a tone which could express her thoughts and relieve her of them.

The maid brought lighted candles.

Pani Walewska turned her head as if wishing not to betray the emotions which she let loose in the dusk of day.

"Light already!" said Pani Walewska with regret.

"Yes, my lady," answered the maid. "Some lady begs to be permitted to see her ladyship."

"Who is she?"

"I don't know. I have never seen her before."

"I have told you so many times that I do not receive anybody. . . . If she is poor . . . give her some money. . . ."

"I told her . . . but she gave me her visiting-card and this letter."

Pani Walewska took the card.

"Eléonore Augier! I do not know her! Ah, a letter . . .!"

Pani Walewska tore the envelope and read:—

"I shall be greatly obliged if you would not refuse your help to the bearer of this note, Mme. Eléonore Augier, wife of my former army companion, Captain Pierre Augier. I humbly apologise for my daring.—PHILIPPE, CTE. ORNANO."

Pani Walewska blushed slightly.

"Somebody I know recommends the lady to me," said Pani Walewska, making an effort to be indifferent. "I must receive her. Ask her in."

"The boy also? She came with a child."

"Naturally!"

The maid went out, and after a while a young woman, leading by the hand a little boy, entered the boudoir.

"Mme. Eléonore Augier?" said Pani Walewska.

"Yes, Madame," whispered the stranger.

"Pray be seated."

Mme. Augier sat on the chair nearest to the door. The boy hid his head in the folds of her skirt.

Pani Walewska looked inquisitively at the stranger. The woman appeared to be very attractive. She was tall, her

figure was graceful; her pale face contrasted with her black silky hair, while good temper shone in her longish eyes.

"What brought you to me?" asked Pani Walewska.

"Madame, you must be very good . . . one who is so beautiful! . . . Ah, how beautiful you are, *mon Dieu!*"

Pani Walewska was near smiling ironically at such an awkward compliment, but Mme. Augier's voice was so sincere that she refrained.

"I permit myself to repeat my question, the rather as I should like to do something for you because of the recommendation which you bring me."

"I do not know myself! I would not have dared! But I have seen your portrait, painted by Gérard, and having seen how beautiful you are, I thought you must be as good as you are beautiful. . . ."

"Then you know the painter, Gérard?"

"Yes, he is a great artist, but only now I see that he is not as great as they say, for he could not render your beauty . . ."

"Thank you," interrupted Pani Walewska. "Then, what can I do for you? Pray tell me. I am listening."

Mme. Augier became confused, and spoke only after a while.

"Madame, have you never heard of me?"

"No, I have not."

"My former name was Revel . . . my first husband's. . . . My maiden name is Denuelle de la Plaigne!"

"Denuelle? Denuelle? It seems to me I have heard . . . but I do not remember in what circumstances."

"I was at Mme. Campan's boarding-school. . . ."

Pani Walewska did not listen very attentively to that preface, having understood that she would be obliged to listen to many details for which she did not care; she looked at the boy, who now became more courageous, and was peeping from behind his mother's chair, and she was surprised.

"My parents were quite rich . . ." continued Mme. Augier.

"Is this your son?" asked suddenly Pani Walewska, who was attracted by the child's features.

"Yes, Madame! His name is Léon."

"Léon! What a remarkable likeness!" said Pani Walewska, speaking as if to herself.

Mme Augier grew animated.

"Is it not? Even in his movements! Exactly like . . ."

"Like who?"

"Well . . . Madame . . ." mumbled Mme. Augier, "like . . . like the Emperor." Pani Walewska paled, and asked quietly—

"Then this boy is . . . his son?"

"Yes . . ." answered Mme. Augier in a whisper.

Pani Walewska drew herself up, her eyes became icy. Now she understood who that woman was . . . she was that Eléonore who frightened her like an evil spirit, with whom they threatened her so often, whom, not long since, they wished to use as a tool against her, whose name was mentioned in every intrigue against Pani Walewska. . . . Well, they repeated to her again and again that the Emperor wished to adopt her son and make him his successor. . . .

Pani Walewska's icy look froze Mme. Augier.

"I was mad . . . I should not have done it. . . . You will be so kind as to excuse me. . . . In my position . . . I wished to find some help. It is impossible to reach the Tuileries! They forbade me long ago. . . . I have written to M. Constant. . . . He was always very kind to me. . . . Yes, formerly. . . . But now everything is changed. . . . You know . . . !"

Mme. Augier drew the child to her and began to cry.

"Poor child . . . !"

Pani Walewska remembered little Alexandre; her hands shivered, she dropped her head sadly.

"Be assured," said Pani Walewska, with an effort, "if I could do anything . . ."

"Would you be so kind! Do I deserve it? Only now I see my levity. . . . But to-day, when I heard the twenty-second cannon-shot, I did not know what had become of me. . . . It seemed that an abyss had opened in front of me . . . that I was falling into it. . . . I rushed to the Tuileries. I fought my way through the crowd, and when I was about exhausted, I was pushed by the human wave to the gate of the palace. I noticed a Prefect that I knew, and begged him to let me in to see M. Constant. . . . The Prefect knew me well from the time I used to go with Léon to see the

Emperor, who was very fond of him, and liked to see him during his lunch. . . . But the Prefect frowned, shrugged his shoulders, and when I insisted he told the sentry to drive me away. . . . The crowd laughed at me. . . . I was furious. . . . I seized the boy by the hand and wished to shout that he was his first-born son! Fortunately a woman, whom I knew, was there, and she induced me to go home, otherwise I might have found myself in the prison of Mazas. . . . When I came to myself I remembered you, Madame, and I came. Do you see this blue mark on my hand? I got it at the Tuileries. . . ."

Mme. Augier bent as if under a weight pressing her down.

Pani Walewska was awestricken. She forgot her involuntary dislike for Eléonore's name, she forgot all wicked gossip told her about Mlle. Denuelle de la Plaigne, and she saw herself in her. She felt Eléonore's every word—she lived that dreadful morning with her. Pani Walewska's pride gave way to the thought that perhaps she herself was only the Eléonore of to-morrow, and she shivered.

"But why am I telling you all this?" said Mme. Augier, sighing painfully.

"I must know everything; I am listening to you."

"Precisely speaking, that is all," said Eléonore simply.

"And what would you have done had they let you into the palace?"

"Ah, *mon Dieu!* . . . I had besought M. Constant to help us, to say a word while dressing the Emperor. . . . Ah, if I only could speak with M. Constant . . .!"

"Then really you cared so much to see the valet?" asked Pani Walewska, to whom the desire to see the valet seemed very strange, as it was expressed by the mother of the Emperor's son.

"Naturally, Madame! M. Constant can do much. More than M. Méneval! I would have told him about my misfortune, and he would have helped me."

"You counted only on him?"

"Ah! on whom else could I count?"

"Perhaps you are right! What, then, do you wish from me? If I could not do anything by myself, if not, I promise you to see Constant."

"The question is about my husband. You know, Madame, about my first husband? No? Nor about my second marriage? Then I shall be obliged to tell you about . . . Only Léon . . ."

Pani Walewska rang for her maid and told her to take the boy and amuse him. He was taken away, notwithstanding his energetic protestations.

"My father was a rich manufacturer. I was brought up in luxury. I was sent to Mme. Campan's boarding-school. The difficulties were great, but my mother overcame them all. At Mme. Campan's was the Emperor's sister, Caroline—later, the Queen of Naples. She took a fancy to me. Having finished my studies at the school I returned home. My mother was fond of luxury—my father was ruined. M. de Revel, a captain, used to visit us; he was thought to be very rich. I married him. Three months after the wedding I lost all my illusions. M. de Revel was an accomplished rascal, but I loved him just the same. He did something wrong; he was degraded, dismissed from the regiment, and then arrested and imprisoned for theft. My father died; my mother and I were left almost in misery. Then I remembered Queen Caroline. I wrote to her. She took care of me, obtained a divorce from de Revel, and appointed me as her reader. Then I met the Emperor . . ."

"When was it?"

"On the twenty-sixth of January in 1806—the day he came back to Paris after the victory of Austerlitz. It lasted until April. Queen Caroline, then only Princess of Berg, was kind to me, even when I could not continue my duties as her reader. Léon was born in December. I was proud of him. The Emperor was in Warsaw, but they took good care of me here. I had a house in this street. . . ."

"Rue de la Victoire?"

"Yes. The Emperor came back—it was 1807, the most happy year in my life."

"Eighteen hundred and seven!" repeated Pani Walewska in a hollow voice, feeling in the meanwhile that the edifice of her own dearest memories was crumbling.

"The happiest! I was feasted and respected. People predicted a crown for Léon. Every day I was obliged to be at the Tuileries. I had influence; Talleyrand visited me

frequently. . . . The Spanish war began. . . . They began to talk about you, Madame, then about Mme. Gazzoni. I wished to be jealous. Gazzoni insulted me, M. Savary scolded me. I had still some illusions. In the meanwhile the Emperor fell in love with Mlle. Guillebeau at Bayonne. I was neglected. My mother died. Lieutenant Pierre Augier proposed to me. I was fond of him; my equivocal position was unpleasant. I married. Pierre was the best of husbands to me; he loved Léon. We were remembered at Court; Pierre's superior officer was attentive to him. But little by little everything was forgotten. About two years since M. Talleyrand called on us unexpectedly and told me about some fresh plans in regard to me, and even sent me an invitation to Queen Caroline's Court. I did not believe him much, but I yielded to my husband's persuasions. Pierre, at the beginning, very much liked all those honours. But then he became jealous of me; he loaded me with bitter reproaches about my past; he would not leave me alone for one minnte; he ruined himself for costly frocks for me, for he wished to surround me with luxury so as not to make me long for Imperial drawing-rooms. . . . I had forgotten about them long ago. . . . But that odd thought did not leave my husband. We had quite a property—it was spent! My husband began to gamble, and was lucky. . . . It amused me when he would bring piles of gold and throw it at my feet every day. . . . Suddenly the luck changed . . . he made debts . . . we had sold almost everything. To-morrow he will be tried by a military court for not having paid debts of honour and . . . cheating at eards. . . . To-morrow we shall be in misery and covered with shame. Yesterday I went to Count Ornano. He was very fond of Pierre when they served in the same regiment. He gave me some money for the most urgent neeessities, but he cannot stop the trial. I told him I intended to call on you. He gave me a note. . . . Pierre could not remain in his regiment, but if they would send him to Spain to the battlefield . . . I would go with him. But impossible to see anybody. It all happened so suddenly. They took Pierre's sword, they put him in the guard-house, and to-morrow . . . to-morrow. He is guilty, but his service was without any reproach. . . ."

Mme. Augier breathed deeply.

"And he does not care about your son?"

"Who knows? In the beginning, especially when the Queen Hortense's son died, as you know they called him hereditary prince, the Empress Josephine herself took a great interest in Léon. The nurse of Queen Hortense's son, Mme. Loir, was then appointed my son's nurse, and she reported to the Marshal of the Court. She was very good, but when they told her reports were no longer required, and when she noticed that everything was over, she was obliged to think of herself. . . . But perhaps I bore you, Madame?"

Pani Walewska rose with an effort.

"What you have told me will do. I know what the question is about. . . ."

"The trial is to-morrow, in the afternoon."

"Very well."

"The best time to see Constant is in the morning, after ten."

Pani Walewska nodded and left the boudoir.

Eléonore looked with astonishment, not knowing what meant that sudden departure. Only when the maid brought her son she understood that it was a cold, haughty dismissal.

Mme. Augier began to cry.

The next day the porter on duty at the Pavillon de Flore at the Tuileries was much surprised when, after a string of carriages of the Court dignitaries well known to him, he noticed a dark green *coupé* coming to the portico as swiftly as the equipage of the King of Naples, or of that of the Prince Eugène. That surprise, however, increased still more when from the carriage, instead of some frightened officer or high official, there alighted a lady dressed in black, who advanced with assured steps to the stairs.

The porter was embarrassed.

The lady wore a thick veil over her face. It was impossible to recognise her. The porter recollected that, according to his orders, he should have asked the lady whom she wished to see, but before he could do so the carriage went into the courtyard to wait there with other carriages, while the lady passed the halberdiers standing at the top of the stairs, entered the antechamber boldly, and went on to the guard-room.

The pages sitting on the benches rushed up when the glass door opened, ready to execute the prescribed bow, but seeing only a veiled lady they looked at each other and neglected the Court rules.

The lady walked to the other door, guarded by a palace commissary clad in rich uniform and with a chain on his neck.

The commissary barred the lady's further progress with a deep bow.

"I wish to see the chamberlain on duty," explained the lady.

"First door to the left, in the pavilion to the right . . . here the chamberlain does not receive."

"I have come for an audience."

"Is it fixed?"

"I have come for an audience, I said!"

The commissary bowed respectfully.

"Such being the case, you will be kind enough to give me your visiting-card, that I may send it to the chamberlain."

The lady handed her card with an impatient movement.

The commissary glanced at it.

"You have not an audience! But I will announce you at once to the chamberlain on duty!"

The commissary called a page, told him something, let him into the next room, and stood at the door.

The lady withdrew a little, trying hard to stop her nervous trembling.

After a while the page returned, whispered something to the commissary, who turned to the lady and said bowing: "The chamberlain on duty is at your disposition, Madame. Pray, this way!"

The commissary opened the door. The lady passed the threshold, and having found herself in a room full of army, court, and state uniforms, hesitated for a moment. The page, however, invited her, by bowing to her, to go to the left, towards a window, where he brought her a chair.

The room was filled with whispers, but the men present were so preoccupied that they did not notice the lady.

Only when, from the next room, the chamberlain on duty, clad in a red velvet coat, white vest and white breeches, rushed

out, the gathered dignitaries wished to bar his way; but when the latter, not answering their question, directed himself to the lady, his steps were followed by inquisitive looks.

The Chamberlain greeted the lady with some embarrassment.

"Madame, pray excuse me for keeping you waiting. *Grande entrée* is just over. . . . If I had expected! Thousand pardons!"

"Do not excuse yourself. I was very much amused here."

"Ah, Madame, I have so much to do. I cannot move without hearing here and there 'M. de Rémusat! M. de Rémusat!' Oh . . . what a long list! And only Cambacères is with the Emperor. I have not a moment . . .!"

"I shall not take much of your time. Pray, put me at the head of that list, that is all I want."

"What, Madame?" asked M. de Rémusat, moving his eyebrows as if wishing to make them help him to understand.

"I must see the Emperor on important business."

"Ah! h'm! . . . only the thing is . . . Pray, Madame, I do not find your name on the list. . . ."

"It does not matter," answered the lady proudly.

"Naturally! Only the rules, the rules . . . His Majesty looks every morning through the list of the people to whom an audience is granted, and one could not let anybody in without his approval. . . ."

The lady arranged her veil nervously. M. de Rémusat smiled stupidly, and continued: "A very heavy responsibility. The Emperor is in a good humour and it must not be spoiled. . . ."

"But, M. de Rémusat," said the lady bitterly, "I must have something of importance if I come here, and I think it will not be difficult for you to mention my name to the Emperor."

The Chamberlain became confused.

"Naturally . . . it will suffice to say 'Mme. Walewska.' Pray forgive me, but it is my duty to observe the rules strictly. They are very strict since the marriage. . . . But if you command, Madame, we yield at once. Yes, at once! When introducing the Turkish Ambassador, I shall have the honour to mention about the agreeable surprise."

Pani Walewska nodded approvingly. M. de Rémusat bowed and disappeared in the crowd of uniforms.

Pani Walewska, who was now persecuted with intrusive looks, tightened the veil over her face and sank deep into the chair, as if wishing to be seen as little as possible. Her presence, however, was noticed by a young colonel of dragoons, who, at sight of her, interrupted his conversation with General Monthion, and came to her.

Pani Walewska made a movement of surprise at the colonel's bow.

"You have recognised me?"

"Yes. I even permit myself to guess the purpose of your presence here."

"I could not postpone . . ."

"I understand, and, so much more, I appreciate your readiness. In the meanwhile, I crave your forgiveness for having addressed myself to your good-heartedness. I must tell you frankly that . . ."

"That you had not confidence in me. . . ."

"No, Madame, I doubted whether you remember that an Ornano existed. . . ."

"You judge by the Corsicans . . . they forget easily, then . . .?"

"A Corsican, Madame," replied the colonel enthusiastically, "never forgets."

"But only when he hates. . . ."

"Or when . . ."

"It is about two years since I saw you last," interrupted Pani Walewska.

"The time has not seemed so short to everybody. . . . To me it was very long. . . ."

"I must congratulate you at your rapid advancement. You are already a colonel!"

"And on what shall I congratulate you, Madame?"

"You—me?" said Pani Walewska hesitatingly. "Only . . ."

"Precisely, Madame," responded M. de Rémusat's voice at that moment from the side.

Ornano withdrew discreetly. Pani Walewska rose.

"Is it my turn?"

"Precisely, Madame," mumbled M. de Rémusat. "I do not know whether I shall have an opportunity. . . . I would like to

make you wait. . . . Such a crowd! . . . I do not know when it will be over. . . . His Majesty will be tired. . . . I would suggest that you should postpone till to-morrow. . . ."

"Excuse me, sir! I asked you to tell his Majesty that I came on an urgent affair. . . ."

"Yes, but I cannot; I have no opportunity . . . rules . . . etiquette! I can only put your name on the list for to-morrow, and submit it to the Marshal's approval. . . ."

"Then I shall wait for the Prince of Friul!"

M. de Rémsuat perspired.

"Yes, Madame, undoubtedly. . . . It is very painful for me, so much more that my respect for you . . . But in this case the Prince of Friul will not be able. . . . Etiquette! We cannot make exceptions, even for kings! There are no exceptions! His Majesty was kind enough to tell me that there are no exceptions. . . ."

Pani Walewska leaned on the chair and asked suddenly: "Then you have announced me?"

"Yes, certainly! The Chancellor is my witness!" muttered the Chamberlain. "But precisely there are no exceptions!"

"The Emperor told you that for me . . .!"

"Not at all, but as a rule there are no exceptions. . . ."

Pani Walewska laughed nervously.

M. de Rémusat wished to better the situation.

"On the contrary! He himself, in my presence, said to the Chancellor: 'I must wrong Davoust, and give the Principality of Lowicz to Walewski, who sustained great losses during the Prussian campaign, and I am under an obligation towards him, since his reconciliation with his wife.' So said his Majesty."

Pani Walewska bit her lips till they bled.

"You see, Madame, de Rémusat is always ready . . ."

"To do something awkward!" said a sneering voice from beside him.

M. de Rémusat turned, and perceived M. de Talleyrand smiling negligently.

The Chamberlain looked proudly at the ex-minister, who was in temporary disgrace.

"Sir, what do you mean?"

Talleyrand smiled contemptuously.

"That you have hurt Mme. Walewska, and that you did not excuse the Emperor. . . ."

"It is my concern!"

"Madame," said Talleyrand to Pani Walewska, not paying any attention to de Rémusat's angry looks, "I would be very happy to do anything for you."

"Precisely!" rejoined the Chamberlain. "Be so kind as to tell me what the question is about."

Pani Walewska shook off her surprise, looked proudly at the courtiers, and said—

"I am obliged to you, sirs, the affair is of too great importance. . . ."

"Anything in my power!" said Talleyrand.

"Pray command me!" rejoined Rémusat.

Pani Walewska shook her head negatively.

"The affair is so important that nobody can do anything but either the Emperor himself, or his lackey, Constant. . . ."

Rémusat opened his mouth in surprise; Talleyrand wished to parry the blow with a witticism, but Pani Walewska nodded to them, and went to the door.

In the guard-room Ornano offered her his arm; she hesitated, but then accepted it.

In the portico Pani Walewska stopped suddenly, looked round her, and said, endeavouring to be quiet: "Then this is the Pavillon de Flore?"

"Do you see it for the first time?"

"For the last! Ah, you asked me on what you should congratulate me. You have seen by yourself . . . great honours. . . ."

"And I was the cause of . . ."

"That I have learned to-day what would have happened to me to-morrow! I am thankful to you; less illusions, sadder, but quieter it is! Poor Augier! Are you now at the Court for good?"

"No, Madame . . . only momentarily. I am going again into the world, where it is easier not to think, easier to . . ."

Pani Walewska looked at him with her burning eyes.

"The future is wide open to you."

"Yes, just at this moment!" whispered Ornano.

Pani Walewska pressed his hand, entered the carriage, and departed.

The Grand Marshal of the Court, Duroc, was sitting in the drawing-room of Pani Walewska's little palace in the Rue de la Victoire, and looking round him with increasing uneasiness. It was half an hour since he had come there, sincerely sorrowful on account of an errand he had received, and till now neither Pani Walewska nor Princess Jablonowska had come to meet him. He was hurt, for he used to come here often, and was always a welcome guest, and to-day they made him wait. . . .

Duroc looked at the clock, and then rang the bell.

A lackey appeared at the door.

"Have you announced me to her ladyship?"

"Yes, your grace."

"Perhaps the maid did not tell her . . ."

"She did," resounded the sonorous voice of Pani Walewska from the side. "Pray excuse me; I made you wait, but I had very urgent letters to finish."

"It is I who should ask your forgiveness for importuning you, but I could not come yesterday, and to-day all news is precious. How is the Count?"

"You are asking about my little boy? Thank you, he is very well."

"Corvisart was commanded to call to-day."

"It will be useless. I shall not let him see my son."

Duroc looked surprised at Pani Walewska, not being able to make out what her ceremonious tone meant.

"It is always better for a physician to have charge."

"You are right. I have sent for an experienced one. . . ."

"And how is your health?"

"As you see, I am very well."

Duroc became abashed, but having understood that it would be best to speak straight out, he asked: "You have been at the Tuileries to-day?"

"Yes."

"And do you know why the audience . . ."

"But it is so clear! I was not put on the list; I had not presented my request to the Marshal of the Court; I had for-

gotten the etiquette—in a word, it is my fault that I have been sent away!"

Duroc could hardly conceal his embarrassment.

"You are right, Madame; but notwithstanding all that, the Emperor regretted much that he could not receive you."

Pani Walewska curtseyed to Duroc.

"Marshal, I hope you will not refuse my request that you will express my warmest gratitude to his Majesty for his most kind words . . .?"

"Madame . . .!"

"The honour done me. . . ."

"But, Madame," interrupted Duroc, "do I really deserve to be sneered at?"

"You, Marshal?"

"Yes, I, Madame!" said Duroc with emphasis. "I was always very respectful towards you, and—I must be frank in telling you—I was proud of the confidence you had in me . . . and I swear that I should not like to lose it. I will say more, I do not know of any circumstance which would change my sentiments towards you."

Pani Walewska's eyes met Duroc's clear, noble looks.

"For my part I never neglected, and I should not like to lose an opportunity of acknowledging your kindness of heart; but at this moment you were not speaking to me in your own name, therefore do not take to yourself what I said. . . ."

"Madame, if we are to talk, one way or another, let us talk frankly."

"But only with you."

"Very well, then, with me! You feel hurt, and I guess why. But permit me to explain to you. The Emperor must very often be ruled by apparently trifling reasons. You have suffered . . . but were you alone? Do you think that it is very easy to send away a person whom one would like to welcome heartily?"

"Not at all! And the best proof is that I never accepted any invitations to the Tuileries, that I refused to become a lady-in-waiting to the Court, that I have never been present at any Court ceremony, except as a mere spectator among the crowd! To-day, however, I dared to think that I too might

come to the throne to beg . . . His Majesty could not doubt that an affair of the greatest importance had prompted me to take that step. . . ."

"Therefore he sent me here at once in order to do what you wished for. . . ."

"A great favour! This morning I was disposed to believe it. . . ."

"Madame, if I might beg of you to be cooler. . . ."

"Am I not so?"

"The Emperor could not grant you that audience. Such an unexpected audience in particular would have had an official character, which, in presence of yesterday's event, of the Empress Marie Louise's illness, of the blossoming of paternal sentiments, would give occasion to gossip, conjectures and malicious remarks throughout the whole of Europe—it would have made a bad impression at the Court of Austria—in a word, it would have lessened the solemnity of the moment of the birth of the heir to the throne. His Majesty is obliged to pay attention to appearances, and he cannot allow there to be any doubt about the Empress's influence—especially now, when she is not only a consort, but a mother too. These are, Madame, the real reasons. . . . To all that I should add that your message of yesterday moved the Emperor very much, but in the meanwhile it made him fear, the Emperor sometimes listens to his advisers . . . that your impulsiveness, Madame, would not permit you to keep within the limits of an audience. That is all. Do you still doubt? Do you think there are other reasons? . . ."

"No, I even believe that you speak from the depth of your conviction, that you believe your reasoning to be right."

"Certainly, I do believe so. I must tell you something more, in order to convince you how the Emperor remembers you. The moment is a very important one, and it requires concentration in the family circle, requires that he, as well as the millions of his subjects, should familiarise himself with the idea of his future heir. . . . This moment must not be disturbed by any discord. For that reason the Empress Josephine was told to go to Switzerland. I am sure that your name was pronounced also, but the Emperor repulsed the idea, and that

because he is sure of the delicacy of your sentiments. . . . This is not all. Although he had a right to be happy with his son, and might well have forgotten about everything and everybody, he summoned me last night, very late, for he had learned about some of your wishes. . . . Well, then . . . the Principality of Lowicz will be taken from Davoust and given to you. . . ."

"As an indemnity for the losses of my ex-husband, sustained during the Prussian campaign, and because that husband reconciled himself with me."

"I do not understand."

"That is strange, for I have repeated the Emperor's own words said to-day to Cambacères."

"This is new to me."

"I am sure you will not refuse M. de Rémusat the only quality he has, of being exact in repeating what he hears! Then those words, probably, are whispered already throughout Paris."

"And you are so much hurt by this?"

"I do not care one whit for it, only I am surprised at such ill-directed munificence. Yes, my former husband sustained a great loss during that memorable campaign, but that loss could not be repaid even by the Emperor. As for me, I do not accept the present. What I have will suffice for me and my son."

"But it is permitted to his Majesty . . ."

"I do not accept. I am very sorry that this morning I nearly disturbed the blossoming of paternal sentiment, as you put it."

"Madame!" exhorted Duroc in a tone of persuasion, having noticed a sudden change in Pani Walewska's face.

"I am sorry . . . Yes. But as you came to do what I was going to ask, then you must learn that at this moment of the blossoming of paternal sentiments I thought it would be right to ask that the son of Eléonore Denuelle de la Plaigne should not be ashamed of his adoptive father, Captain Augier; that Eléonore and her husband should not be exposed to the consequences of rolling down from the heights, where they were put by a caprice, and in the same way pushed from them so that a curse might not hang over the head of the King of Rome."

Duroc turned pale.

"Madame! What do you mean? I do not understand!"

"Nothing more or less than this: that Eléonore Augier has

no means of livelihood; that her husband is being tried to-day, and perhaps is already sentenced to be dismissed from the army; that little Léon, once the Benjamin of the Court, was turned away from the Tuileries by a sentry, and this was at the moment when his only wish was to kiss Constant's hand."

"But this is a real fatality! I assure you that this affair will be arranged at once in the most satisfactory way for the Augiers. You know that the Emperor would not neglect this."

"Then he will fulfil my most heartfelt request!"

Duroc took Pani Walewska's hand and kissed it.

"Always most noble, and remembering only others, not herself! The Emperor will be deeply moved. He will do anything to be forgiven! By the way, I hope you will be kind enough not to refuse to see him to-day? . . . "

"You forget where I have come from but a little while since!"

"Ah, not there . . . but as usual. . . ."

"No, I cannot see him."

"Are you hurt, then, so much? . . ."

"I do not delude myself. . . . Until to-day, when I went through the Rue de Rivoli and took my way to the Diana Gallery, I was comforted by the illusion that, if I chose, I might at any moment drive up to the Pavillon de Flore. To-day I no longer entertain that illusion. . . . I shall not set foot in the Tuileries. . . ."

Duroc was frightened, and tried to persuade Pani Walewska that her resolution had no real ground. Pani Walewska was unmoved. Duroc became sad.

"It is too bad. I shall not dare to repeat what you have said to me. And I hope you will change your mind, if the culprit himself asks your forgiveness. I undertake that, if so, the Emperor will be here personally to-night. . . ."

"You may be assured that he will be received with all the honours due to him."

Duroc opened his eyes wide.

"I shall at once order all the lights in the house to be lighted."

"But it must be *incognito!* Nobody must know . . . just as it used to be. . . ."

"It is impossible! The Rue de la Victoire deserves such an honour for having offered hospitality so many times to the Emperor, at Number 29, and then at 48 . . . and, expecting a similar honour for other houses, it has a right to pay homage to his Majesty, and to boast of that honour!"

Duroc clasped his hands.

"Madame, consider!"

"Yes, I do consider, but too late!"

"Then you intend . . . ?"

"To leave Paris to-morrow."

"To depart from this house, where his heart attracts him . . ."

"Mme. Gazzoni might be put here, so that the street should not be false to the name of victory."

"You know him so little . . . you do not distinguish between a deep affection and momentary fancies. . . ."

"Unfortunately, I do not," answered Pani Walewska, suppressing the trembling of her voice. "There are so many names, so many gradations, that I cannot see the difference. As for me, my account is only from the time of his return after the victory at Pultusk."

"Such great people must not be measured by ordinary rules."

"Therefore, I neither measure nor judge. I withdraw in order not to stop the blossoming of paternal sentiments, and not to stay in the way of the Empress Marie Louise, who, as it seems, loves her husband and is loved by him."

"No, no! I cannot listen to all this! I know only that you must receive the Emperor to-day, that you must have a talk with him. . . ."

Pani Walewska rang the bell. A lackey appeared at the door.

"Light all the lights! Put a scarlet carpet at the entrance stairs, gala livery for everybody! I expect the Emperor at any moment! Every one of you must be at his post. Be quick!"

The lackey, frightened at the energy with which the order was given, disappeared.

Duroc pressed his head with his hands, and looked with painful astonishment at Pani Walewska's face flushed with energy.

"It would have been better if I had not come here. But . . . you must remain . . . consider . . . you will not allow yourself

to be carried away by anger . . . for the sake of your son . . . of the Emperor. . . ."

"This time I shall think only of myself."

"But you forget that I can stop you by force, and I shall use it for your own sake."

Pani Walewska smiled sadly.

"No, Marshal! I shall not remain willingly, and you will not employ force, for you would produce what he wishes so much to avoid: gossip and conjectures! It must be so! I thank you for the kindness which you have shown me. Do not be frightened—remember my words—my departure will be easily borne. Ingratitude, with which I shall be branded, will brighten the sorrowful forehead. It is time for me to go. You are happy, Marshal, you love the Emperor and you may remain; for the same reason I must depart."

CHAPTER XIX

A GLOOMY December night held the park of Walewice Castle in its frosty embrace, covered silvery lawns and the icy branches of elms, limes, and oaks with its dark veil, uniting the earth and the heavens in one awful bottomless darkness.

Walewice Castle was silent. Its shutters were closed, its doors were bolted; only the grey smoke of the chimneys showed that it was inhabited.

In fact, notwithstanding this apparent lack of life, the lower part of the castle was full of light. All the servants were up, even Baptiste, so powerful and so careful of himself, was not yet asleep.

The servants' quarters were filled with many voices in lively discussion, while near the master's apartment only whispers could be heard; significant looks and eloquent gestures were exchanged.

The attention of the servants was concentrated on the entrance to the Chamberlain's apartment. Here every opening of the door, every new order given either by Baptiste or by John, was earnestly commented on.

For a week the Chamberlain had been fighting with death; for a week the end had been expected every minute; for a week two physicians had not left the sick man; for a week Pani Walewska had spent days and nights either at the Chamberlain's bedside or in a little room adjacent to his chamber.

The physicians had twice announced the end as near; twice they had been obliged to state their ignorance; twice they had been surprised that the weak body of the old man had refused to obey the expectations of science, and dared to live still.

That unexpected resistance of the sick man hurt the physicians' pride, who, deceived in their judgment, noticed with pleasure that the Chamberlain grew weaker, that the fever increased, that the breathing was shorter, heavier. . . .

At last they announced a crisis, but being afraid to meet with a disappointment they agreed that improvement was possible.

That night precisely the Chamberlain lost consciousness and grew rigid.

Pani Walewska was informed. She was frightened at the lugubrious faces of the physicians, and still more at her ex-husband's condition. She did not dare to have any hope.

They took her out of the room and made her sit in an arm-chair in the Chamberlain's dressing-room.

Pani Walewska did not try to play the part of a despairing consort—she neither would nor could cry.

But nevertheless she was torn by sincere sorrow. She was ready to redeem the Chamberlain's health and strength with her own life. Yes, for Pani Walewska's ideas had long since undergone a great change with regard to the Chamberlain, because that old man, that grumbling husband who was ridiculous, who insulted her, who destroyed her ideals, who shut her up in Walewice, that wearied, repulsive man, had become her only friend—the only one who never asked her why she came to his house which she had left, why she sought a shelter here, why she had rushed from Walewice to Warsaw, Wilna, Vienna, and Paris, and why she returned unexpectedly to his castle.

The Chamberlain was even so careful in his isolation from her, he saw her so seldom and with refined elegancy only for a few moments, that one could easily believe he despised her.

In the meanwhile, however, the same Chamberlain was unwearied in finding means, when it was a question of remembering his ex-wife's necessities, and the solicitude he showed about the little Alexandre was admirable.

Pani Walewska often noticed how mysterious hands foresaw her wishes, remembered the smallest expense, removed every sorrow. At the beginning she attributed that mysterious care to some one else, and having found its true source wished

to ascribe it to her ex-husband's ridiculously ambitious plans, till she was convinced that the Chamberlain's only thought and desire and happiness was to look at little Alexandre, to caress him and call him his Imperial Highness.

Pani Walewska appreciated the Chamberlain's behaviour, and wished to show him her gratitude. And although in Walewice Castle there was the same separation between the Chamberlain's and Pani Walewska's apartments, although ex-husband and ex-wife did not see each other and did not speak to each other, they never had been united more tightly, never had mutual affection been more sincere.

And now Pani Walewska was going to lose that friend! . . . She was looking at the door leading to the Chamberlain's bedroom, expecting at any moment to hear the gloomy news, which might deprive her even of this shelter and throw her on the billows of a precarious life!

For in Walewice she was only a guest on whom the Chamberlain's family looked angrily. She did not have any right there —the shelter was given to her through kindness.

She left Paris poorer than she was when she went there. She had taken nothing from the little palace in the Rue de la Victoire, except that which she brought with her, she refused the principality offered to her, and she had wilfully become the modest ex-wife of a Chamberlain, without any influence, without any remains of the brilliant career, without the crumbs from the lordly table.

Perchance such a disinterestedness was imprudent, but even now Pani Walewska did not regret it; on the contrary, the consciousness that she had never asked for anything for herself, made her satisfied, it tranquillised her, it attenuated her fault, and lessened the bitterness that flew from the thought she was forgotten.

It is true that she left Paris wilfully, that she did not listen to Duroc's persuasions, but she could not remain there, she could not bear indifferently that which she had learned, viz. that she was one of Napoleon's several love intrigues, she did not wish to bring up her son near to the heir to the throne and to Eléonore Augier's child; and then she could not bear humbly the insult she had received at the Tuileries. There-

fore she had left Paris. She had left without the hope that happy moments should return, moments when it seemed to her that she was the star of the king of kings. But she left looking at his Majesty, with a prayer on her lips, with a wish that her sorrow should not reach even Bonaparte's feet. Pani Walewska could not expect that the Emperor, about whom it was said that he had become the kindest father and the best husband, should take his thoughts from his family and preserve any feeling for Pani Walewska. Pani Walewska neither desired his affection nor would she have dared to respond to it. But she hoped that from time to time some friendly news would reach her from Paris, that some reminiscences of her would prompt a kind word to be sent to the quiet of Walewice, that at least there would be some inquiries about her son. . . .

Unfortunately, since she left the capital of France her name was not repeated even by an echo; nobody cared what had become of the woman whom formerly they worshipped like an idol.

It is true that a few months ago Pani Walewska had gone to Warsaw, and there had heard with a throbbing heart of the Emperor's unconquerable power; it is true that the French Ambassador, Pradt, was exceedingly kind and respectful towards her, offering her his services. He said something about the Emperor's official inquiries.

And Pani Walewska tried to deceive herself by believing that from among the numerous armies, from among camp fires, from Bonaparte's tent over which floated the Imperial standard, a kind thought was directed to her. That illusion was so intoxicating that Pani Walewska, excited to the extreme, rushed to Wilna, where she expected to meet the man to whom some mysterious, irresistible force attracted her. And she went not because she dared to think that past happiness would return, not because she wanted to impose her sentiment on Napoleon—no—but because she wished to be intoxicated with his glory; she did not wish to see in him the brutal lover, but the dreamed-of hero, who challenged the immortality of Alexander the Great and Cæsar.

In Wilna, however, Pani Walewska met with only the rear of the army, and the anxious governor, Hogendorp, who did not

fear to take such care of her that on the fourth day he had obtained from headquarters all instructions concerning her. General Hogendorp followed those instructions exactly. Therefore he came to see her in full uniform and advised her to return to Warsaw, for the journey after the army would be very fatiguing for her, and would cause some conjectures.

But when Pani Walewska wished to carry out her former plans, the honest face of the Dutch General twisted maliciously, and from his mouth fell a sharp remark: "I am authorised to tell you, Madame, that there are already too many *actrices* at headquarters."

Pani Walewska returned to the calm of Walewice—again wounded, and full of bitterness that her enthusiasm was treated so roughly, so brutally.

The months passed away. The joyful news about the great army reached even Walewice, and Pani Walewska learned that Napoleon had taken Moscow, from whence he dated his bulletins. . . . All at once everything became quiet, silent. . . .

Notwithstanding the bitterness which continued its destructive work in Pani Walewska's heart, she did not cease to worship Napoleon. She accused herself of being too bold, of being too capricious; for how was it possible that he, who was carrying out his vast plans, who perhaps was now following the tracks of Alexander the Great's cohorts, who perhaps had already left Moscow and conducted his eagles to the shores of the Ganges and looked at the Himalayas, how could he remember her? Could he neglect his historic mission for her? Could he lower his soaring to her?

Thus thought Pani Walewska as she looked at the door of the Chamberlain's bedroom.

All at once the door opened. A physician stood before Pani Walewska, who shivered, and asked quietly: "What news?"

The physician made a helpless movement.

"Well, the fever has disappeared . . . the respiration is even . . . the Chamberlain sleeps soundly! . . ."

"Then the danger?"

"It is over, Madame. Difficult to believe! For where from? what? They would not believe! He was already stiff, and . . . nothing! He is snoring now! . . ."

"Is it certain?"

"Upon my honour, Madame. To-day, two hours since, I would have wagered my hand that it was the end. . . ."

Pani Walewska entered the bedroom, shook the physician by the hand, made him promise to do all he could, and returned tranquil to her apartment on the first floor.

But hardly had she had time to kiss her sleeping son, when the maid rushed into the bedroom with a letter.

Pani Walewska looked at her in surprise.

"What is the matter? What is it?"

"A letter from Warsaw, brought by a special messenger from the Princess! He was told it was very urgent!"

Pani Walewska took the letter slowly and put it on the table, feeling certain that it contained some tedious condolences for the Chamberlain and a handful of gossip from Warsaw.

But the maid, having noticed her mistress's indifference, said confidentially: "The messenger said it was awfully urgent, and the Princess promised him a piece of land if he came in good time."

"Very well! Tell him to rest. I will write that he came in good time."

"But . . . he says that the Emperor Napoleon himself has come to Warsaw."

Pani Walewska trembled, and, not paying any attention to the maid's improper familiarity, broke the seal, and began to read:—

"Marie! The French army does not exist! The Emperor arrived to-day at Warsaw with only Roustan and Caulincourt. He starts to-night, by way of Lowicz and Dresden, for Paris, to collect a fresh army. I remembered you. Go at once to Lowicz—wait at the post office, the horses will be changed. I am sure you will come in time. I beseech you! You have an opportunity. My hand trembles as I write this. Kind Anetka told me about it. Pradt is running away from his embassy. Dress in black. Greet Anastazy. The best way will be to take Alexandre with you. I am awfully afraid for my Antony, whether he has met with some accident. He deserved the Legion. It is late—I am going to make calls. Half killed and half dead—the rest drowned on some bridge.

Awful! They must apply mustard to Anastazy's feet. My mother used it up to her death. Matthew's wife will know something more, for her husband was in the Hotel d'Angleterre, where the Emperor stopped. What an idea for a crowned head to stop in a hotel! Do not believe what they say about that *actrice*, it was said only *comme ça*. The Emperor was speaking of you yesterday to Wonsowich—who took a fancy to Anetka. He may try, for everything is over with de Flahaut. I applied salts twice. All this is dreadful! Therefore go at once. Hearty kisses from yours for ever,

"JABLONOWSKA.

"P.S.—The Emperor said yesterday to Pradt: '*Du sublime au ridicule il n'y a qu'un pas!*' Very just. Remember, for one forgets such things."

Pani Walewska had finished the letter, put it quietly aside, and looked with her eyes full of stupefaction at the inquisitive maid's face. Then she took the letter again and glanced at it.

In the meanwhile her cheeks became scarlet, her hands trembled, her bosom began to heave, her mouth quivered. All at once some power shook her; she lifted her white forehead proudly; her eyes brightened.

Pani Walewska began to give orders. They were short, precise, embracing all details, not permitting any hesitation, even for one second.

The castle became feverishly animated.

The servants packed boxes, grooms were getting ready sledges, lackeys were bringing to Pani Walewska overseers, housekeepers, and even Baptiste was called. Pani Walewska gave orders what should be done during her absence and the Chamberlain's illness.

Having done with the servants, Pani Walewska went down to the physicians. There she assured herself that the Chamberlain was really better, made them promise her that they would not leave the invalid, mentioned something about the urgent necessity of departure, that she would be back very soon, and returned to her apartments.

Here she found that the nurse had dressed little Alexandre, wrapped him in a fur, and was ready for the journey.

When before the portico of the castle the sledge-bell re-

sounded, Pani Walewska donned her fur cloak, put on fur overshoes, and listened to John's report, that although the road was good to Lowicz, an outrider had gone ahead just the same to see if there were not heavy snowdrifts. After that she took the Princess's letter, glanced at the postscript, folded it, and put it in her bosom.

"Shall we be going?" asked the nurse.

"Yes."

Pani Walewska looked round as if to see whether she had not forgotten anything, and went towards the door thinking that she would go. She must go—she must see him. She was going, for she must persuade herself that it was all false—lies, base intrigues! Yes, for he could only conquer, for conquest was his life, his right, his destiny! There was no power that could resist him, there was no army which his genius could not break and crush. He commanded the world; there was nobody more powerful than he. Neither seas, nor mountains, nor precipices, nor rivers dared to stop him. He went on, and would go on further and further; he would gather new laurels and announce his will, till everything was fulfilled. There were not two roads, two destinies for him—he had but one war cry: Forward! The man who carried such a burden on his shoulders, who aroused in his countrymen such ambition, confidence, and pride, must be conscious of his might. He reached beyond the clouds with his eagle-like eyes, over the horizons of the future, beyond the mist of destiny!

He . . . Napoleon! . . . defeated . . . crushed . . . humiliated . . . Napoleon! . . . As if it could be possible that the sun could be quenched! . . . as if heat could drink out the ocean! . . . as if a thunderbolt could strike where it originated! . . .

But suppose . . . suppose the great army does not exist? . . . suppose? . . . No, never! It is false, base joking, blasphemous wickedness. She looks at him, beholds him! . . . Amongst the crowd covered with gold and silver, on the background of fierce grenadiers' bearskins, shining shakoes and armour, showy hats and tall plumes, on the field bristling with iron, steel, and brass, he stands thoughtful, neither moved by new laurels nor overwhelmed by the great deeds accomplished . . . already making

new plans. . . . And the field shivers from the firing of salutes, and thousands of people are intoxicated with joyful exclamations! Half a million soldiers, half a million heroes, half a million strong arms and broad chests would have to be torn to pieces, half a million blows to be parried, half a million hearts to be pierced, half a million heads to be crushed before he could be reached!

And he stands thoughtful! He looks on helplessly crowded enemies, on burned towns, on crushed bastions, on ruined strongholds, on veils of smoke, where the fire of cannons has torn the bodies of those who dared to oppose him, on stubborn foes who attempted to fight a Titan! He looks thoughtful . . . and his lips mutter kind words of pardon! . . .

Over a village a storm rages. Zigzags of lightning cut the clouds, unbridled wind carries devastation, nourishes fires, crushes, twists, scatters, tears, overturns. . . .

But hardly has it passed away, hardly does it withdraw its thunderbolts, hardly does it show a scrap of blue sky, when a sad smile comes on the village from the height of the firmament—a sunbeam searches which wound it may heal, which bent stem it may raise. . . .

It is the same with him, Napoleon!

And she rushes to him and looks at him, and breathes his triumphs, and is intoxicated with his glory . . . and thus for ever! . . .

Pani Walewska's servants, headed by the housekeeper and Baptiste, waited for her at the sledge for a long while, till at last, not able to understand the cause of her delaying after such haste, they began to steal quietly to the door of her apartment, expecting that new orders would come. But the first reconnaissances were without any result. At last the nurse, encouraged by the boy's crying, alighted from the sledge, handed the child to the maid, and went to Pani Walewska's apartment.

She found it empty. She looked in this and that room, till at last, supposing that Pani Walewska had gone to see the physicians, she turned to the part of the castle occupied by the Chamberlain.

Hardly had the nurse passed the threshold of the boudoir

connected with the Chamberlain's dressing-room than she uttered a cry of horror. Pani Walewska was lying on the floor senseless.

At the nurse's scream the servants rushed into the room and the two physicians followed them.

Pani Walewska was put on the sofa and brought to her senses.

The physicians having ordered some potion returned to the Chamberlain. The nurse rushed to them.

"O Lord! What could be the matter with my lady?"

"Nothing of importance just now," said the elder physician quietly. "In an hour she will be quite well."

"Is it possible? What a strange illness! . . ."

"There is no illness whatever. Understand? It is the heart; that is all."

"The heart?"

"Yes, if it does not kill you at once, then . . . nothing for the present. . . ."

EPILOGUE

THE Rue de la Victoire was in the habit, not long ago, of retiring earlier than its neighbours. Like a former beauty borne down by age, not only was it the first to put out its lights and lock its doors, but also, having forgotten about former sleepless nights, would look askance and address reproaches to others less inclined to go to bed early.

Therefore the nearest neighbours of the Rue de la Victoire must have been very much surprised when one December evening they not only perceived lights in the elegant little palace marked with number 48, but also noticed several carriages standing in front of it. This time the Rue de la Victoire itself must have been wondering, for that little palace had lately been full of surprises—it would become suddenly silent, and then also suddenly animated. . . . Sometimes the whole of Paris would shout, shiver, roar, and the little palace would seem dead; and on the contrary, while there was nothing going on and everything was quiet, when there was no reason for animation—the little palace would resound with the music of a spinet, would assume a holiday appearance.

There had been many such changes. Till about a year ago the little palace had become quiet, its lights were put out regularly, its doors were locked at the same hour. Suddenly it seemed that the former habits had returned.

The Rue de la Victoire stopped its breathing, looked inquisitively at the palace, and listened attentively.

If, however, the carriages at the door, lighted vestibule and circulating servants, gave a good opportunity to the sight, hearing was very disappointed, for the little palace was silent. . . .

Hours passed away . . . the coachmen were slumbering on

their boxes, the horses dropped their heads sleepily, the palace was still shining with lights, but it was silent. . . .

Midnight came. . . . On the background of the lighted hall a man appeared. He rushed out, shouted to the nearest coachman, jumped into the carriage; the vehicle rolled noisily, and disappeared in the street.

After these signs of life, which drew from stupor the other coachmen, the former quiet returned.

Suddenly, at the other end of the street resounded the rattling of a carriage, and with it the same hollow sound that was heard a while ago. The vehicle was returning at double speed, its wheels producing shining sparks, and it stopped short.

This time two lackeys rushed out from the palace and approached the carriage door, from which alighted a tall man, wrapped in a cloak, and, not paying any attention to the servants, put out his hand to a priest and helped him to alight; they both entered the hall.

The man threw his cloak to a lackey, while the priest was taking off his cloak slowly.

"Have you informed the Countess?" asked the priest quietly.

"She wished it herself . . ." answered the man. . . .

The priest pointed at a little bundle which he had brought in with him.

"Count, you be so kind as to show me to a room."

"Pray, this way . . ." answered the Count, and conducted the priest to a small drawing-room. The priest donned a surplice, a stole, and put on the table a couple of small silver vessels.

The Count went out for a moment, and came back with an old, bent servant.

He was quick to understand. The servant went ahead, and the silence of the palace was broken by the trembling tintinabulation of a silver bell.

The Count accompanied the priest to the door of a room, and entered the adjacent boudoir, hardly lighted by logs of wood burning in the fireplace. Here he sat in a chair, and covered his face with his hands.

"What now?" asked a voice near the Count.

The Count took his hands from his face, looked at the man sitting near by, and answered: "He is there . . ."

The man moaned, and plunged his looks into the fireplace.

For a while nothing was heard but the crackling of burning wood.

"Where is Alexandre?" asked the Count in his turn.

"He is with the Princess."

"And Corvisart?"

Instead of an answer small quick steps were heard at the other end of the boudoir, and they were followed by the appearance of a gentleman in dark brown swallow-tail coat and white necktie; his bald head was surrounded by a crown of white hair.

The Count rushed to the gentleman.

"Doctor, what is your opinion?"

The physician stopped, and looked at his snuff-box, which he held in his hand.

"I have nothing to say. . . . Nature may get the better. . . ."

"For God's sake, sir, yesterday you said . . ."

The physician took the Count by the hand, and shook it heartily.

"Monsieur Ornano, General! Have courage! Yesterday it seemed to myself . . . I had charge of the Countess's health formerly also! I was not afraid of the inflammation of the lungs, but I did not suppose that the heart . . ."

"Heart!" repeated General Ornano, in a hollow voice.

"Yes, Count, God is my witness that never before did the helplessness of our knowledge weigh on me as heavily as to-day!"

"Then, you think . . ."

Corvisart bent over his snuff-box.

"That, perhaps, there above, she will find a better physician. . . ."

. . . . . .

Pani Walewska breathed with difficulty, opened her half-closed eyes, pushed aside a lock of hair from her shapely face, and looked round with failing eyes.

"Are you round me?" whispered Pani Walewska's white lips. "You are all . . . very well . . . I must take farewell of

you. . . . It is hard, very hard to die! And I lived so much, so much. . . . Love Alexandre . . . do not abandon him. . . ."

"Mary!" moaned a man at Pani Walewska's bed head.

"Paul! My dear brother! Take from my jewel-box Gorayski's ring! Wear it. And you, Philippe, forgive me for having brought you so many sorrows. . . . What month is it now?"

"December."

"December! Awful, cruel month! You know that December took from me that with which I wanted to live, with which I wished to defend my name! But it is my pain, my own! . . . You have nothing to do with it! You must be always with the Emperor, for I shall be with him! You think . . . that island? There is no power that could overthrow him, crush him—he will come back—he will return. . . . He must! Understand! For he took an oath to me! And in return he has taken all I had—he has taken blood from thousands of our people! Lord! . . . They are playing! *Retraite!* . . . He is coming . . . our blood flows again, the insatiable earth drinks it! . . . Flames once more—misery once more. Death! Confusion! O Lord, and I loved the man who was going not to destroy, but to build! . . ."

. . . . . .

In the cemetery in Kiernosia the willows move their heads sadly, the pines look thoughtfully on the grave mounds overgrown with green.

Quiet! . . . Oblivion! . . .

And the story of the beautiful Pani Walewska falls into forgetfulness. . . . The Polish land absorbs it. . . .

On the cemetery of Kiernosia the plough cuts its furrows, and returns to life the harvest of death. . . .

THE END

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